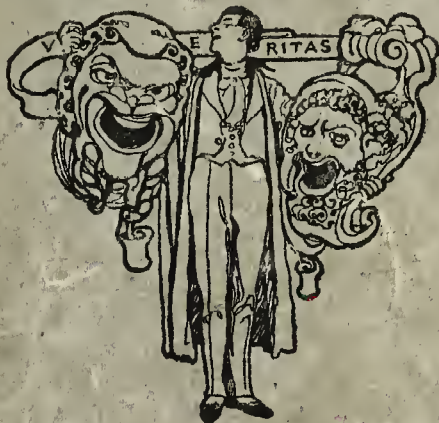


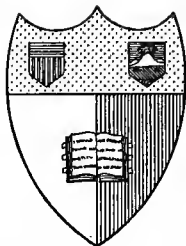
HARVARD PLAYS

The Harvard Dramatic Club

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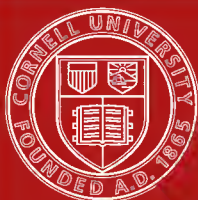
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HARVARD PLAYS

EDITED BY

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PLAYS OF THE HARVARD DRAMATIC CLUB

THE FLORIST SHOP

By WINIFRED HAWKRIDGE

THE BANK ACCOUNT

By HOWARD BROCK

THE RESCUE

By RITA CREIGHTON SMITH

AMERICA PASSES BY

By KENNETH ANDREWS

NEW YORK
BRENTANOS
1918

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Rust

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A 379749

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THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, CAMBRIDGE, U.S.A.

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PREFACE

The four plays in this volume have been selected from a large number of one-act pieces produced by the Harvard Dramatic Club in the ten years of its life. It was founded in 1908 by a group of undergraduates, headed by Edward Sheldon and Edward Eyre Hunt, who were dissatisfied with college dramatics as they knew them. They wished to see produced as many as possible of the more promising short and long plays which the one course then existing in Dramatic Composition at Harvard College was beginning to produce. There was not, of course, until four years later any 47 Workshop. To three ideas this small group of founders held tenaciously, though the principles caused some distinct opposition at the outset and even some wavering within the fold when the organization was started. These were: the plays produced must not be reproductions of well-known plays of the professional stage, present or past, nor first productions of foreign plays not seen elsewhere, but original work of students at Harvard or Radcliffe; secondly, women, presumably Radcliffe students, must play the feminine rôles; thirdly, the plays must be coached by some professional actor or producer of recognized ability. The obvious aim was to get rid of

PREFACE

the frequent distortion and absurdity attending women's rôles when played by young men, and to insure the plays competent performance because of rigorous training by an experienced coach.

Unlike some of the dramatic clubs which have come into being because of the success of the Harvard Dramatic Club, it has never been to any extent a social organization. It has existed primarily and almost entirely to produce the original plays written by undergraduates and graduate students at Harvard and Radcliffe. Its membership has been kept small, — rarely more than thirty, — resting on election from all the candidates in any of its activities: playwrights, actors, stage hands, business managers, etc. The women who have played with the Dramatic Club have always been guests, never regular members. It has been guided by an executive committee composed of the president, the secretary, the treasurer, and some four members elected to represent the Club at large.

Each autumn the Club has held a competition for long plays, and each spring a competition for short plays. The three judges for each of these have been found among the graduates of Harvard closely connected with the drama; for instance, Jules Eckert Goodman, Walter Pritchard Eaton, Winthrop Ames, H. T. Parker and Edward Sheldon. Each year the Club has produced at least one long play, and from three to four one-act plays, giving at least three performances of each bill.

The plays have been staged, until the last two

PREFACE

years, by men well known in the theatrical world, such as Wilfred North, Franz Reicher, and Richard Ordynski. More recently, as some undergraduate member showed special skill in coaching or recent graduates who had gone into theatrical production could be summoned to aid, men younger in the profession have been used, such as Samuel Eliot, recently connected with the Indianapolis and Cincinnati experimental theatres.

Always the Dramatic Club and The 47 Workshop have been co-workers in a common field. The best play of each year has been taken by the Craig Prize Play competition. Next the manuscripts went into the Dramatic Club competitions. From what remained of long plays each autumn and short plays each spring The 47 Workshop has made its programs. Intentionally it has given right of way to the Dramatic Club as the older institution and as a means of placing a play before the general public rather than a special audience. Each organization has loaned actors, scenery and properties to the other. Coöperation, never rivalry, has been the common purpose, and there has never been a complication in the relation of the two organizations.

The Club has had no building of its own, but, rehearsing wherever space could be found in some college building or more recently in the rehearsal room of The 47 Workshop, has given its plays in public halls of Cambridge and Boston, or in the private theatre of the Hasty Pudding Club. For its support the organization has depended upon its small membership fees and, above all, the sale

PREFACE

of tickets for its performances. Consequently, it has had to figure closely in its finances and has not always found it easy to make both ends meet. It has, however, throughout the ten years of its life, had a steady and loyal, if somewhat small public.

Its achievement has been remarkable, particularly with its one-act plays. Very quickly it developed a high degree of efficiency in its stage hands, indeed in all mechanical matters connected with its production. Long waits, bad lighting, poorly handled scenery, have not been characteristic of this organization. Its one-act plays and even some of its long plays have been widely used by all kinds of amateur dramatic organizations throughout the country. The Harvard Dramatic Club gave the first production of Percy Mackaye's "Scarecrow" when the long plays submitted in an autumn competition did not seem to the judges in any instance worthy of production. Turning to this work of a Harvard graduate who had always been most loyal to their interests, the Club showed so clearly the dramatic worth of "The Scarecrow" that the late Mr. William Harris, after sending his representative to see it, decided to produce it on the professional stage. The one-act play "The Clod," originally produced by the Harvard Dramatic Club, went to the Washington Square Players and thence successfully over the country in vaudeville, to find a permanent place in the pages of a collection of one-act plays in the Drama League Series.

The executive committee has steadily withstood

PREFACE

all efforts to make the organization graduate rather than undergraduate or to pass over the control to a mixed organization of undergraduates and graduates. Nor has it been an easy task for these undergraduates to check occasional pressure to repeat some successful play of the moment on the professional stage, or to produce for the first time some interesting play from abroad, but their firm stand has shown clearly for ten years that college undergraduates can give original plays acceptably to a mixed audience and with real usefulness to the authors involved. As a result the Dramatic Club has been widely copied for college and other amateur dramatic clubs throughout the country. Of course each place has had to make its own adaptations in maintaining the principles for which this club has stood — original plays played by a mixed cast and coached by a person of competence, a professional if possible.

The opening of the present college year found the organization cut to pieces by the departure of its members for the War. Though a few of the younger still remain at Harvard, it has seemed to them best to discontinue their organization until peace comes again. Already some of the most active members in recent years have lost their lives in the cause for which this country entered the War. At such time as the survivors shall return, they will find their properties, their scenery, and their records waiting in the keeping of The 47 Workshop, which eagerly anticipates their old-time and valued coöperation in the producing

PREFACE

of Harvard plays. Until their return, this little volume, and perhaps a sequel—for there are other plays as good in the unpublished repertoire of the Harvard Dramatic Club—may stand as proof of the success of an undergraduate effort well conceived, doggedly sustained, and undoubtedly useful.

GEORGE P. BAKER.

THE FLORIST SHOP

ONE ACT COMEDY

BY

WINIFRED HAWKRIDGE

CHARACTERS

MAUDE. The florist's bookkeeper. Young and fairly good-looking. Her voice drips with sympathy.

HENRY. An ordinary, tough office-boy, about sixteen. He gives the impression of being in long trousers for the first time. He is, in spite of his invulnerable exterior, impressionable.

SLOVSKY. The middle-aged, Jewish proprietor of the shop.

MISS WELLS. A timid, talkative spinster, dressed in timid, tasteful colors. Her hat, in a modest way, is crisper and more daring than the rest of her costume. She is faded, sweet, rather colorless, reminiscent of a youth which has dwindled rather than ripened to middle age.

MR. JACKSON. Rather over than under medium height. Baldish, pale, with sandy mustache, and a solemn, somewhat pompous manner. Slightly older than Miss Wells.

Acted for the first times by the Harvard Dramatic Club, at Cambridge and Boston, April 6, 7 and 8, 1915. Copyright, 1915, by Winifred Hawkrige.

Published in the Smart Set Magazine, October, 1915.

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THE FLORIST SHOP

SCENE: *A Florist Shop. At the back, a broad show window, dressed with flowers, — azaleas, roses, daffodils, violets. To the right of the window, a glass door, leading from the street. On both door and window, the name "Slovsky," in bold script, shows reversed. Two steps lead down from the door into the shop. The woodwork is white, and the floor tiled irregularly in large blue and white flagstones. On the right, upstage, a glass showcase filled with flowers, and beyond, further downstage, in a group of bay trees and flowering azaleas, a plaster Cupid, designed for garden statuary. On the left, shelves, on which are grouped flowers, plants, vases, attractive wicker baskets, and other paraphernalia of the trade. Over the shelves, a mirror, built in. At left-centre is a white counter, on which are pen and ink, envelopes, etc., a telephone and ledgers. At lower left, an arched doorway leads to another part of the shop. The curtain rises on Maude, seated behind the counter, at work on a ledger, and Henry, who is arranging flowers in the case.*

TIME: *Early morning of a brilliant April day.*

MAUDE [*as the telephone rings*] Hel-lo! This is Slovsky's. Yes 'm, we make a specialty of taste-

THE FLORIST SHOP

ful offerings. [*Her voice drops to a tone of great sympathy.*] Soitenly, you kin leave it to us, and we will insure its being quiet and in good taste. If you 'll just give me some idea of who the party was. [*Still greater sympathy.*] Oh! a little baby! Ain't that too bad. [*Sincerely.*] Well, we must look on these things as all for the best. I would suggest six dozen of them tiny white Mignon rosebuds, in a long spray, with white ribbon. The general effeck will be all green and white — light and pretty, and kinder inner-cent. [*Soothingly reassuring.*] Promptly at two — I'll see to it myself. [*Hangs up the receiver.*] Henry, ain't that sad? A little baby only six months old. I wonder what it died of? Teeth, prob'ly.

HENRY [*toughly*] Aw, Maude, I've seen you take a dozen of them funeral orders a day, for the last four years, an' you still got a weep f'r every one of them. Sniffles is your middle name. What 's it to you?

MAUDE [*earnestly*] In a way it ain't nothing, but I always get to thinking how it prob'ly suffered, and how the fam'ly suffered, and what it 'd been like if it lived to grow up — and how what 's jest "Two o'clock prompt" to Slovsky's is something like eternal doom to them, and what 's jest 29 Main Street to Slovsky's errand boy is shelterin' thoity or foity souls in anguish. I like to think of them things, Henry. It makes the woik more interestin'.

HENRY [*moved by her eloquence, and therefore tougher than usual*] Aw, cut out the sob stuff!

THE FLORIST SHOP

MAUDE. Up to the rubber fact'ry, now, I made two a week more, but I did n't git real life. But here — honest — I read to improve my mind, the way everyone ought to, but I often think Florence Barclay never wrote nothing half so sad or romantic as what goes on right under my nose.

HENRY [*jeering*] You'd oughter save your stren'th. All this sad, sobby slush takes it outer you.

MAUDE. It ain't all sad. Many's the love affair I've watched grow from a fifty-cent bunch of vi'lets to a fifty-dollar shower bouquet of roses and orange blossoms — all bought at Slovsky's. D'y' ever stop to think, there ain't been a bright spot or a dark spot in anyone's life in this town but what Slovsky's got a record of it in their day-book? Henry, if you want to know a man's real nature, look at his florist's bills.

HENRY. I bet it don't woik.

MAUDE [*opening the book at random*] Well, here's Billy Trendall; you know, that rich old bachelor. Oct. 1, four dozen chrysanthemums to Miss Vi'let Harvey; Oct. 7, same goil, three dozen chrysanthemums. That's all f'r Vi'let. Dec. 2, to Miss Mary Beal — she come out Thanksgiving time — one double size bunch of vi'lets. Dec. 15, four dozen American Beauties to Miss Harriet Prouty. He's jest telephoned in an order of lilacs for that new bud that made such a hit. He's been going on like this f'r years.

HENRY [*struck by a new thought*] Say, Slovsky's would have to close, would n't it, if it was n't f'r nuts like him?

THE FLORIST SHOP

MAUDE. Jest the same, he's got taste. He starts every goil on a new flower. It jars me when they keep on sending the same kind to every one, as if there was n't any difference between them.

Enter Slovsky.

MAUDE. Good morning, Mr. Slovsky.

SLOVSKY [*in good humor*] Good morning, Maude. Business is good this morning. Two weddings, a reception and six funerals, besides the reg'lar trade.

MAUDE. I gotter attend to a poor little baby's funeral myself, Mr. Slovsky. *Exit.*

HENRY. Say, you orter heard Maude sobbin' on over that kid's funeral. She was wise 'n ever. You 'd think she was dead herself. I says to her, "What 's it to you?" I says, but she —

SLOVSKY [*severely*] Young man! Them cheap jokes you make with that girl don't go here, see?

HENRY. Aw, I was just kiddin'. What harm did it do?

SLOVSKY. In the pants business, which my brother is in, you could make fun of that girl's sympathetic nature all you wanted, because there is a reg'lar call for coats and pants, whether people got it hard hearts or soft ones.

HENRY. Huh?

SLOVSKY. When do we have our biggest sales in the florist business? On Christmas Day and St. Valentine's Day. In other words, when everyone 's full of sentimental thoughts. My brother, now all he needs to do is to fit people's arms and legs, which is easy because they stays the same size,

THE FLORIST SHOP

but what we got to fit is people's hearts, — which is always changing. That's where Maude is worth her weight in gold. Whether it's a funeral or a wedding, if the party hears a person on the other end of the wire entering into all their joys and sorrows, why, next time they got an order to place, — it goes to Slovsky's. You leave Maude alone.

Reënter MAUDE. She seats herself at desk.

[*Continuing to Henry*] You go send off them azalea plants to the Home for Indignant Females.

Exit Henry leisurely.

SLOVSKY [*going to Maude's desk in genial mood*] Well, Maude, this sending complimentary flowers to customers was a great little scheme of yours. Them two debbitante society buds, now, you sent roses to when they got engaged has just sent in, on account of it, their wedding orders. You have n't seen in the papers, now, any more debbitantes likely to bring trade?

MAUDE [*rather shortly*] Lord knows the debbitantes get enough flowers. There's others would appreciate them more.

SLOVSKY. You stick to the debbitantes — they're the best proposition. Sent anythink off lately?

MAUDE. Yes [*a pause*]; some orchids last night.

SLOVSKY [*slowly*] Ah! orchids. I don't know as you need send out orchids. Roses is good enough, or even sweet peas. Unless it was very classy trade?

MAUDE [*after a pause*] It was a party that would appreciate them.

THE FLORIST SHOP

SLOVSKY [*with a keen glance at her*] Well, I leave it to your judgment. Only, be careful don't throw away no orchids for nothing. *Exit.*

MAUDE [*enigmatically*] H'm. [*Henry enters with a jar of bachelor's-buttons, which he arranges. He drops some blossoms on the floor.*] Careful, Henry, you dropped some of them bachelor buttons. [*Henry picks them up hastily, leaving one on the floor. The telephone rings.*]

MAUDE [*taking up the receiver*] You want some flowers sent to your wife; what kind shall I send? [*Coldly*] You ain't got no preferences? [*Coldly*] Very well, then, I can select them myself. Any message? [*Disappointed tone*] No? Oh, yes, your card. [*In significant tones, with deep sarcasm*] We have a supply of them here. [*Hangs up receiver with a bang.*] Well, what d' you think of that, Henry? That was young Davis who owns the rubber. This is their wedding anniversary — married just a year ago. They had the biggest wedding we ever sent out. The bride's bouquet was a shower of white orchids and lilies of the valley, poifectly enormous. And last month he leaves a standing order for American Beauties every morning to that Mademoiselle Looey over to the Gaiety. Henry, there's a lot of suffering goes on in the homes of the rich.

HENRY. Aw, I'd just as lief suffer. [*He starts with empty tray for other room.*]

MAUDE [*calling after him; she has an inspiration*] Henry! You go tell Slovsky to dooplicate that shower bouquet of orchids and lilies of the

THE FLORIST SHOP

valley, and send them on to Mrs. Davis, with his card.

HENRY [*returning, interested*] What's the dope, Maude?

MAUDE [*sentimentally*] Who knows, but if he returns after an evening spent with gay companions to find his bride of a year weepin' over a wedding bouquet of white orchids and lilies of the valley — who knows but it may stir up memories of the past?

HENRY [*impressed*] Gee! Who knows but you may fix that up, Maude? What'll you bet?

MAUDE. There's lots that goes on under my nose I'd like to fix up. [*Confidentially*] I got a case now, Henry, I'm woikin' on —

HENRY. What d' y' mean — workin' on?

MAUDE [*mysteriously*] Never you mind. [*The telephone rings. She answers it.*] Yes, madam, those violets came from us. No, we did not forget the card. I understood from the party that the party did not want their name di-vulged.

HENRY. Say, that gink must have money to burn to send flowers and not git the credit for it.

MAUDE [*impressively*] Don't you believe it. It makes him seem to care more than the men who put their cards in. And she gets thinking and thinking who it can be, and when she finds out she's half dippy about him. He won't seem like a real man — he'll seem all she imagined a man might be before she found out they was n't.

The door opens and Miss Wells enters, hesitatingly. She has the manner of entering on an adventure. She advances by little spurts, flutter-

THE FLORIST SHOP

ing and retreating. She is wearing on her coat a charming coquettish spray of purple orchids, tied with a ribbon. Henry comes forward.

HENRY. Can I show you something?

MISS WELLS [*fluttering*] Is — is — could I see the young lady?

HENRY [*bawling, at which Miss Wells shrinks*] Maude! Lady to see you.

MAUDE [*coming forward, very cordially*] Why, how d' you do, Miss Wells. I ain't seen you since you came in here Easter to buy that lily for your fiancay. Ever since I been here — four years — you've sent him an Easter lily for Easter. I think it's a lovely idea.

MISS WELLS. I have sent Mr. Jackson a lily at Eastertide ever since we became engaged — fifteen years ago.

MAUDE [*shortly*] Fifteen years must seem a long time to be engaged.

MISS WELLS [*with a touch of dignity*] Both Mr. Jackson and I believe in long engagements. When Mr. Jackson's business affairs get so he can leave them for a few weeks — we've always planned — and of course I expect you to help me choose the flowers.

MAUDE. I always am partial to a pink wedding, myself.

MISS WELLS. When we were first engaged he used to say pink was my color.

HENRY [*listening, grins derisively*] Huh!

MAUDE [*sharply*] Henry, you sent that Davis order off? If you ain't, you better get at it.

THE FLORIST SHOP

[*Henry slouches off.*] Then you just came in to look around to-day?

MISS WELLS [*moves flutteringly nearer, points to her orchids*] I — I came about — these. I suppose I should n't wear them till I made sure — but they were too lovely. [*With a little laugh.*]

MAUDE [*woodenly*] Made sure of what?

MISS WELLS [*happily*] That Mr. Jackson sent them. I — I did n't realize he could be so romantic. [*Simply*] It was the way I imagined lovers would act — before I had one.

MAUDE. H'm! Ain't that a new hat you got?

MISS WELLS. I think — don't you? — in the spring — the April sunshine makes us look shabby. I felt I had to buy a new hat.

MAUDE. I know. In the spring I always want to start something myself.

MISS WELLS [*happily*] I think it must have been the Easter lily that — started Mr. Jackson. The day after I came here and ordered the lily as usual — these [*touching the flowers*] began to arrive. It seems so — so reckless for Mr. Jackson. I always understood the orchid was a very expensive flower. Though the day after we were engaged, he sent me a beautiful bouquet — two dozen red carnations.

MAUDE [*sotto voce*] Red carnations is always the sign of a gink!

MISS WELLS. I beg pardon?

MAUDE [*sharply*] Look here, did Mr. Jackson tell you he sent them orchids?

MISS WELLS. No; he simply looked at them and said: "Someone has been getting reckless

THE FLORIST SHOP

with her money." He — he — frequently says playful things.

MAUDE. H'm. What did you say?

MISS WELLS. I said: "They were sent to me without a name — but I think I recognize the donor."

MAUDE [*with sudden joy*] Oh, you said that, did you? How 'd he act?

MISS WELLS. He said, jokingly, "A fool and his money are soon parted." Then we dropped the matter. From his off-hand manner I saw he did not want further thanks.

MAUDE [*disappointed*] Oh, yes. [*Busies herself at ledger. Miss Wells hesitates, lingers and approaches timidly.*]

MISS WELLS. Of course it *was* Mr. Jackson. There 's no one else it could have been?

MAUDE [*deliberately secretive*] I ain't allowed to di-vulge the name of the party. The party says to me, "The lady would n't remember me," he says —

MISS WELLS [*gasping*] He said?

MAUDE [*returns to ledger*] So I ain't got any right to let the cat out the bag.

MISS WELLS [*excited*] Then it was n't Mr. Jackson.

MAUDE [*mysteriously*] I'll tell you this. A man that sends carnations he usually sticks to carnations. He don't suddenly switch to orchids.

MISS WELLS [*muses*] When I was in high school, a boy named Staples sent me a valentine. The boys called him Stoops. He was cross-eyed. This — gentleman — did you notice his eyes?

THE FLORIST SHOP

MAUDE. The handsomest pair of large, boining brown eyes I ever seen.

MISS WELLS [*distinctly fluttered*] Burning brown eyes! [*Contemplates the idea.*] I — I have never seen exactly that kind of eye. Mr. Jackson's are light brown, but, no — I should n't call them burning, exactly. What was his general appearance?

MAUDE. Tall, imposing, well set up — the bearing of a count — or an adventurer!

MISS WELLS [*frightened, yet delighted*] You don't think he could be an adventurer, do you? I — I have never happened to meet one —

MAUDE. Oh, no, indeed! His manner was grave and kind — yet bitter — as if some woman had made him suffer. I thought he had a secret sorrow.

MISS WELLS. As I remember Stoops, he was rather solemn — almost sulky; but I hardly think it was because of a woman. Of course, the teacher used to keep him after school a great deal — unjustly I sometimes thought, but — [*disappointed*] Yes, — it may be Staples.

MAUDE [*positively*] The name was not Staples.

MISS WELLS. He gave you his name?

MAUDE [*firmly*] Which I am not at liberty to divulge.

MISS WELLS. Did he say anything which might give a clue —

MAUDE. When I asked him for his card, he said: "Let the flowers carry their own message. She —" His voice broke here.

THE FLORIST SHOP

MISS WELLS [*sympathetically*] Poor fellow!

MAUDE. "She would n't recall me." [*Returns to books as if matter were closed.*]

MISS WELLS [*coming nearer, timidly*] What — what color was his hair?

MAUDE. Jet black — with a sprinkling of white about his temples. But not from age.

MISS WELLS. He has suffered. [*Consciously*] Ah! He must think harshly of women.

MAUDE [*rallying her*] Them orchids don't look it, do they? Do you know what them kind costs? Two dollars apiece!

MISS WELLS. Apiece! [*She is staggered.*] Have you — is there a mirror here? [*Maude indicates one; Miss Wells studies it. eagerly, then pulls out her hair a trifle about her face and shakes her head rather sadly.*] No!

MAUDE. I've always heard you was considered very pretty.

MISS WELLS [*without illusions*] Nobody's told me so for years.

MAUDE. Some men don't change. To them a woman once beautiful is always beautiful.

MISS WELLS [*timidly*] I've always supposed that was because they did n't take time to notice she had changed.

MAUDE. He notices. He said to me to-day —

MISS WELLS [*gasping*] He's been here to-day?

MAUDE [*nods*] He stood right at that shelf. [*With an inspiration*] That very bachelor's-button [*points to floor*] dropped from his coat.

MISS WELLS [*while Maude busies herself with*

THE FLORIST SHOP

her books surreptitiously picks up the flower and hides it in her purse] Bachelor's-buttons! Poor fellow!

MAUDE. He said: "I wonder by what happy chance she wore lilacs on her hat?"

MISS WELLS. Some years ago I took some lilacs to church. There was an exchange rector. Does — does this gentleman — with the burning eyes — look like a rector?

MAUDE [*disgusted*] Not him. He had on his vest right side to and wore his clothes with an indescribable air of distinction. I think he had on one of them Arrow collars you see in the street cars.

MISS WELLS [*surveys herself again in mirror, gives a little pull to her coat, and adjusts her hat*] Do — do you think he lives here in town?

MAUDE. He was more like a man who has knocked about considerable, equally at home with princes and paupers — a citizen of the world.

MISS WELLS. And his character?

MAUDE. Determined. One who would sweep all obstikles before him.

MISS WELLS [*rather frightened*] A — a strong man?

MAUDE. With his passions under poifick control, but a whoilwind when roused.

MISS WELLS. Perhaps — perhaps I had better keep this from Mr. Jackson.

MAUDE [*nonplussed, then emphatically*] I soitenly should n't. The sooner Mr. Jackson knows, the better for all concerned.

MISS WELLS [*wavering*] Perhaps. But I

THE FLORIST SHOP

must n't take any more of your time. [*She starts to go. Enter Slovsky.*]

SLOVSKY [*suavely to Miss Wells*] Are you being waited on, madam?

MISS WELLS [*embarrassed*] Thank you, I don't want [*under his disapproval*] — I might look at some bulbs.

SLOVSKY [*points to other room*] In the other room. [*Miss Wells turns to other room. He bars her path, with glance at Maude*] Them are beautiful orchids, now, madam. I was admiring them from the moment I saw them.

MISS WELLS [*embarrassed*] They — they came from here.

SLOVSKY [*feigning surprise*] Here, Slovsky's? Guess I'm losing track of things. [*Looks at Maude.*] Or maybe you got them just now?

MISS WELLS [*embarrassed, over shoulder*] No — they were sent to me. *Exit.*

SLOVSKY [*walking to Maude*] You sent them orchids to her?

MAUDE [*doggedly, after a pause*] Yes — I did.

SLOVSKY [*with heavy sarcasm*] I don't seem to remember that we have received from her no large orders for decorations lately, now.

MAUDE. Her name's on our books.

SLOVSKY [*taken back*] That so? A customer, is she? Let me see her account. [*Maude, with an air of being in for it, hands him the book.*]

SLOVSKY [*reads in disgust*] 1913 — One Easter lily. [*Turns page*] 1914 — Another Easter lily. 1915 — Another Easter lily! Say, that's good business — she buys from us annually a seventy-

THE FLORIST SHOP

nine-cent Easter lily, and to keep up her wallable trade we sends her a five-dollar spray of orchids. Say, are you gone crazy?

MAUDE [*keeps on working*] Prob'ly.

SLOVSKY. She a friend of yours?

MAUDE. I ain't never seen her except in this store. When I buy flowers for my poisonal friends, I pay for them.

SLOVSKY. Your orders was to place flowers free with customers where they would do the most good.

MAUDE. Your instructions was followed. I put them flowers where they would do the most good. They've done good already.

SLOVSKY [*eagerly*] What? An order?

MAUDE [*shortly*] No, I slipped up against a human savings bank named Jackson.

SLOVSKY. Then where's the good come in?

MAUDE. Them flowers has made a different woman of her already. She's waked up; she's got a new hat. Them flowers has given her what every woman orter have in her life.

SLOVSKY [*restraining his rage*] May I ask what that is?

MAUDE [*shortly*] Romance.

SLOVSKY. Romance! [*Enraged*] Honest, if this was n't a matter of dollars and cents it would be funny! Romance!

MAUDE [*defensively*] She's been getting younger and more sprightly with every bunch.

SLOVSKY. Every bunch? How long has this been going on?

MAUDE. Dating from last week.

THE FLORIST SHOP

SLOVSKY. Then dating from last week you may consider yourself fired.

MAUDE [*surprised and upset*] You — you — would n't fire me, Mr. Slovsky? Take it out of my pay, but don't fire me. I'd rather work here than any place I know.

SLOVSKY. You're fired, all right. Slovsky's can't afford you. You're a luxury. A little heart and sentiment is all right for the flower trade. But this is a retail business. You got it enough to stock a wholesale house. You're fired. [*He leaves the room. Maude is sad for a moment, then recovers her cheerfulness.*]

MAUDE. Back to the rubber!

Enter Mr. Jackson. He saunters about, trying to decide how to begin. He starts toward Maude, but lingers near showcase.

MR. JACKSON [*loudly*] What do you call those purple flowers?

MAUDE [*snappily*] Orchids.

MR. JACKSON. What's the price?

MAUDE [*calls*] Henry! [*Enter Henry.*] This gentleman wants to buy some orchids.

HENRY. Say, Maude, I got important business. Can't you attend to him?

MAUDE [*briefly*] I'm fired. I may have too much heart, but I ain't got so much heart I go on workin' for Slovsky free after I'm fired.

HENRY. Fired? Say, you're kidding. Slovsky thinks the world of you, kiddo.

MAUDE [*bitterly*] Go on, wait on the gent. [*Takes a look at Jackson.*] Take it from me, it's

THE FLORIST SHOP

time I went back to the rubber. I would never of sized him up for better than jonquils. [*Exit to inner room.*]

MR. JACKSON. Have I got to wait here all day?

HENRY [*moving to case, opens it invitingly*] Just a minute, sir. Which kind do you want?

MR. JACKSON. I didn't say I wanted any. I wanted to know the price.

HENRY [*brings out two bouquets*] One dollar for the plain ones; two for the speckled.

MR. JACKSON [*touching a speckled one with awe*] Two dollars a dozen for these?

HENRY. A dozen? Naw, apiece.

MR. JACKSON [*struck all in a heap*] Why — why — it's outrageous! I must see the proprietor at once. Do you hear! I must see the proprietor! [*Maude returns.*]

HENRY. Maude! Here's a gentleman wants to see Mr. Slovisky.

MAUDE [*pins on her veil deliberately*] Well, get him. He's out in back. *Exit Henry.*

MR. JACKSON [*with guile points to the orchids*] Do you sell many of these?

MAUDE. We do. They are popular with the ladies.

MR. JACKSON [*rather struck*] That's so. She seemed to like them.

MAUDE [*taking notice*] Who?

MR. JACKSON. Miss Wells is the lady I referred to. Of Chestnut Street.

MAUDE [*with volumes in her tone*] O-h-h! [*Looks him over. Secretly delighted.*] I've sorter been looking for you, Mr. Jackson.

THE FLORIST SHOP

MR. JACKSON. Eh? You know me?

MAUDE [*covering*] Did n't we have the pleasure of sending you an Easter lily last week?

MR. JACKSON [*heavily*] Hey? Well — I did n't come about that. I — I happened to be passing, and I thought I'd inquire who sent those flowers she's been getting.

MAUDE [*elaborately*] Oh! I will look. [*Searches through ledger.*] They were sent without a card. I am not at liberty to di-vulge the party.

MR. JACKSON. But to one of the family. [*Maude looks inquiringly.*] Practically. I have been engaged to Miss Wells for fifteen years.

MAUDE [*drily*] Oh! Then you're practically one of the family.

MR. JACKSON. I thought I'd inquire if the card was overlooked.

MAUDE [*firmly*] The intention of the party was he did not want his name sent.

MR. JACKSON [*with greater interest; rather belligerent*] He! What'd he look like?

MAUDE [*looks Mr. Jackson over critically*] Some taller than you [*Mr. Jackson straightens himself*] and considerable younger. Handsome as a Greek god!

MR. JACKSON. Well, I'd like to know what he means! Did he explain himself?

MAUDE. I am only here to take orders. I don't ask a person what their motive is for sending flowers. We don't require a license before we sell them.

MR. JACKSON. An advertising scheme! Did he look like a — a life insurance agent?

THE FLORIST SHOP

MAUDE [*smiling cryptically*] He looked more like a gentleman who's never had to soil his hands with trade. [*Mr. Jackson furtively examines his hands.*]

MR. JACKSON. Well, what'd he say? Remember, it's my fiancée he's been sending flowers to.

MAUDE [*affecting reserve*] In — in that case I don't feel I ought to tell you what he said.

MR. JACKSON [*more alarmed*] I insist — or I must speak to the proprietor.

MAUDE [*alarmed*] I'll tell you — though I should n't. [*Mr. Jackson leans forward eagerly.*] He only said: "The best is none too good for her."

MR. JACKSON [*sotto voce*] Two dollars apiece! And she's kept me in absolute ignorance!

MAUDE [*with false sympathy*] Perhaps you ain't been seeing much of her lately?

MR. JACKSON. Why — I've been busy —

MAUDE. It's so easy for another to profit by our neglect.

MR. JACKSON. But she does n't know any other men. Why, we've been engaged for fifteen years!

MAUDE [*with covert sarcasm, which Mr. Jackson does not see*] You would n't think she'd want a change after being engaged to you fifteen years, would you?

MR. JACKSON. Why, no.

MAUDE. Yet, sometimes that's the kind of engagement gets broken oftenest.

MR. JACKSON [*more alarmed*] You think so?

MAUDE [*musingly*] I suppose it's because a woman gets so deadly tired of the same man.

THE FLORIST SHOP

Then, when some dashing stranger dazzles her with unaccustomed attentions — why, I s'pose it turns her head. [*Watches effect on Jackson.*]

MR. JACKSON [*excited*] I forbid you to send her any more of that fellow's flowers!

Enter Miss Wells; sees him, and shrinks back.

MISS WELLS [*almost inaudibly*] Mr. Jackson!

MR. JACKSON [*turns and sees her. Bitterly*] Here you are, then. To meet him, I suppose?

MISS WELLS [*guiltily*] To meet whom?

MR. JACKSON [*sternly*] I see you wear his flowers. Tell me the worst. How long has this fellow been in love with you?

MISS WELLS [*nervously*] I — I don't know.

MR. JACKSON [*sternly and reproachfully*] Jessie, I want the truth.

MISS WELLS [*faltering*] It must have been a very long time.

MR. JACKSON. And you've made me think I was the only man you cared for.

MISS WELLS. Truly, James, I did think so — until to-day. [*Maude starts guiltily.*]

MR. JACKSON [*groaning*] Until to-day!

MISS WELLS. I mean — I never knew he cared — until to-day.

MR. JACKSON. And has he turned you from me? After fifteen long years —

MISS WELLS [*with some spirit*] It's the first time they've seemed long to you!

MR. JACKSON [*with intended bitterness*] It's been longer to you, perhaps.

MISS WELLS. Yes, it has been long, James.

THE FLORIST SHOP

When we were first engaged, it was different. You sent me flowers then; you were anxious to please me. You said that you had placed me on a pedestal. [*With a tremulous laugh.*] It's taken me all these years to find out the pedestal was a — was a — was a shelf.

MR. JACKSON [*genuinely surprised*] Why, Jessie — I've always meant to get married some day. We've never got around to it. There have been so many other things.

MISS WELLS. If it had been first in your mind, the other things could have waited. No! I'll say now what I've never dared to think before — you have n't been the sort of lover I've always wanted. [*She glances down at the orchids.*] I can imagine some men — more impetuous than you —

MR. JACKSON [*feeling very badly*] Ah, that's the kind of man he is, I suppose.

MISS WELLS. Sweeping all before him.

MR. JACKSON [*bitterly*] Young and handsome; a dashing stranger making a fool of himself over you — that's what you like!

MISS WELLS. Yes — we do like to have men make fools of themselves over us. It proves they care more for us than for their own appearance.

MR. JACKSON. The devotion of a lifetime is nothing when some good-looking adventurer comes along —

MISS WELLS [*touching her flowers*] Why do you say adventurer?

MR. JACKSON. What else is he? Sending orchids — to another man's fiancée. At two dollars apiece!

THE FLORIST SHOP

MISS WELLS. You've often said it was the sentiment which counted — not the price.

MR. JACKSON. What right has he to any sentiment over you? I'm going to hunt that fellow up, and — and give him what's what! [*He finishes lamely.*]

MISS WELLS [*frightened*] James! For my sake — don't give him what's what!

MR. JACKSON [*bristling*] You're trying to shield him!

MISS WELLS [*frightened*] No, James. It's you I'm trying to shield. He's twice as big as you are!

MR. JACKSON [*enraged*] I don't care if he's three times as big. I'm going to stay here till he comes — and fight him!

MISS WELLS. Don't! He is a whirlwind when roused! [*Mr. Jackson remains in pugilistic attitude.*] James — I'm not the sort of woman who enjoys seeing two men fight for her. If you want to keep my affection, you'll come back with me now.

MR. JACKSON [*catching at the word*] I still have a chance? Will you give him up for me?

MISS WELLS. I'll be honest with you, James. In some ways he is more my ideal than you are. He seems all I imagined a lover should be. But when I think of a husband, I can't imagine anyone but you. I've got so used to you, James, these fifteen years.

MR. JACKSON. And I've got used to you. Maybe, I didn't seem to appreciate you till he came between us.

THE FLORIST SHOP

MISS WELLS. - But I like to feel there have been two men in my life, James.

MR. JACKSON [*jealously*] So that you can coquet with us both?

MISS WELLS [*earnestly*] Not that, truly. But I feel I'm bringing more to the man of my choice.

MR. JACKSON [*pleased*] You look so pretty, Jessie. I don't blame the other fellow much. [*He looks her over critically.*] But — those flowers. If you want flowers, I'll get you some.

MISS WELLS [*reluctantly*] He meant them in the most respectful way.

MR. JACKSON. Take them off. [*She obeys, laying them on the shelf reluctantly, almost tenderly. He goes to the showcases, signaling to Maude, who has busied herself at the extreme back of the shop during this last dialogue. As she approaches*] I want to see some flowers. [*Maude glances knowingly at the empty place on Miss Wells's coat and smiles.*]

MAUDE [*demurely*] I don't wait here any longer, but I'll wait on you with pleasure. What kind do you prefer? [*Mr. Jackson gravitates toward the carnations. The two women are on either side of him with a sort of critical challenge, which increases as he nears a decision.*]

MR. JACKSON. These carnations [*he falters, perceiving the lack of sympathy*] — are pretty.

MAUDE [*pleasant, but firm*] They are all right, of course, but compared to orchids —

MR. JACKSON [*wavering, looks at Maude, at Miss Wells, and at the orchids; puts his hand in*

THE FLORIST SHOP

his pocket meditatively but unconsciously; then braces himself resolutely. To Miss Wells] Would you prefer orchids, Jessie?

MISS WELLS. No, James; some other flower, please.

MAUDE [*helpfully*] Vi'lets is very nice. [*Mr. Jackson looks at Miss Wells, inquiringly.*]

MISS WELLS. I 'm very fond of violets.

MR. JACKSON [*with new jocularity*] Violets it is. [*Takes another brace.*] The largest bunch you have, young lady. [*Maude selects a magnificent arrangement, gives it to Miss Wells, who pins it on. Mr. Jackson leads the way to the door.*]

MAUDE. Shall I wrap up these orchids for you?

MISS WELLS [*Mr. Jackson at door, waiting*] No, tell him I 'm sorry, but he must n't send any more. [*Miss Wells hesitates, then takes the bachelor's-button from her purse, considers discarding it, then returns it to her purse.*]

MAUDE [*rather bitterly*] No danger; he won't.

Miss Wells and Mr. Jackson exeunt.

Enter Slovsky and Henry as Miss Wells and Mr. Jackson pass the window, engrossed.

SLOVSKY [*surveying Maude with disapproval*] Well, you did n't lose no time getting your hat and coat on. The custom is when fired to finish out the day.

MAUDE. It ain't my custom. When I 'm fired, I go. [*She starts for the door. Henry mutely shows his sympathy.*]

SLOVSKY. Well, good-bye, Maude. Remember,

THE FLORIST SHOP

I ain't got no hard feeling. You understand business is business, and sentiment's something else.

MAUDE [*shortly*] Good-bye. [*Sotto voce, to Henry.*] Say, Henry, tip me wise if them orders to Mlle. Looey begins to fall off. [*To Slovsky, indicating orchids on counter.*] Your orchids has come back. [*As she starts to leave, Slovsky takes the orchids and puts them back in the case.*]

MISS WELLS [*entering, to Maude*] Are you going out? I—I wanted to leave an order. [*Slovsky edges nearer.*]

MAUDE [*with glance at Slovsky*] I can take it.

MISS WELLS. Mr. Jackson and I have been talking it over. He's very insistent; he wants me to—to make it very soon. So I said—next month. There's really no reason why it should n't be next month—though it seems so sudden.

MAUDE. Now, I'm glad to hear that, Miss Wells. I shall take a poisonal interest in this. For you, I should advise—. [*They move toward the cases and stand talking; Slovsky edges nearer.*]

SLOVSKY. Can I help you, Maude? [*To Miss Wells.*] May I ask the occasion?

MISS WELLS [*embarrassed*] A—why—a wedding.

MAUDE [*triumphantly*] A church wedding, St. Mark's.

SLOVSKY [*respectfully*] Ah! St. Mark's?

MAUDE. Roses and southern smilax.

SLOVSKY. Ah-h!

MISS WELLS [*to Maude*] I think I can leave it to you—your taste is exquisite. Mr. Jackson is waiting for me. *Exit.*

THE FLORIST SHOP

SLOVSKY [*shame-faced*] Maude! Did you know about this here wedding when you sent them orchids?

MAUDE [*triumphantly*] I arranged that wedding. [*She starts to go.*]

SLOVSKY [*advancing cordially*] When I make a mistake, I'm willing to say so. I ort a known a smart girl like you would a had a reason behind her. Now, you take off your coat and hat and stay. You're what I always said, an asset to the business. [*Maude deliberates. The telephone rings. Slovsky answers it.*]

SLOVSKY. Yes — I see, I see. Now you just wait a minute, and I'll get our young lady to attend to you. Maude! [*After a moment's deliberation Maude slowly removes her coat and goes to the telephone. A sigh of relief from Slovsky and Henry.*]

MAUDE. Hel-lo! I see. Naturally you do. [*Almost falling into the receiver.*] Oh, might I ask, how much did it weigh? Nine pounds — think of that! You used to send her vi'lets and roses, but you want this to be something different. Now, why don't you send her one of them old-fashioned baskets, with paper lace around the edges. [*She revels in the sentiment.*] All filled with little pink rosebuds and pansies and mignonne and forget-me-nots? [*She laughs sympathetically.*] And I'll just put in some johnny-jump-ups for the baby!

CURTAIN

THE BANK ACCOUNT

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

BY

HOWARD BROCK

CHARACTERS

MRS. LOTTIE BENSON aged 38

MRS. MAY HARDING aged 40

FRANK BENSON aged 48

PLACE. *Any city*

TIME. *Now*

Acted for the first time by the Harvard Dramatic Club, March 31, 1914. Copyright, 1914, by Howard Brock.

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THE BANK ACCOUNT

SCENE: *The living room of the Benson's flat. The furnishings, now rather shabby, at once tell you that this is one of three rooms "fitted complete for \$100."*

There is a gas log at back, and a mantel: upon the mantel a small clock and some cheap and tawdry ornaments. Nearby is a window which looks out on an air shaft. At right is the bedroom which gets its modicum of air from the same shaft.

A small oak table at center littered with fashion magazines, the morning newspaper, etc. Three shelves holding books dangle from a white knob on the left wall. Sofa at right. Chairs by the table.

The hall door is at left, and by it is the pride of the flat — a bell and speaking tube. This, and the radiator in a corner, lift the Bensons out of the class of tenement dwellers. Benson, being a bookkeeper, does no heavy work with his hands, so his wife must, perforce, be a lady. The bell and radiator permit Mrs. Benson to speak of "our janitor" as if he were a battery of personal servants.

The room is very untidy, and, as it is now after twelve at noon, there is a disheartening hopelessness over the whole place.

The curtain discovers Lottie seated at the table. She is wearing a once gaudy kimono, and is read-

THE BANK ACCOUNT

ing a cheap fashion magazine. Lottie was probably pretty when she was younger, but bad air, bad cooking, and constant pursuit of trivial amusements have left her at 38 a faded blonde. At present Lottie's hair has been brushed, but, as it is still too early for rouge, her face is rather a pasty white.

[The bell at the speaking tube rings. Lottie rises languidly, and answers it. Her voice at first takes on a drawling intonation which she fondly imagines suggests culture and refinement.

LOTTIE [*at the tube*] Hello — yes, this is Mrs. Benson — Who? — How much is it? — Very well, I'll have Mr. Benson send you a check in the morning. — Certainly I know it's an old bill; guess you don't know who you're talking to. — I'll report you. — I don't care to discuss the matter with you. — I said you would get it tomorrow. — You'll have to excuse me. I am very busy. Good-bye. [*Lottie bangs the phone on the hook and goes back to her magazine. Presently the bell rings again. Lottie once more answers, but guardedly.*]

LOTTIE [*in the tube*] Hello. — Oh, is that you, May? Come right up. [*She presses the button, waits a moment, then opens the door for May Harding, who is a little older than Lottie, but much the same type.*]

LOTTIE. My God, May, but I came near not letting you in!

MAY. Why not?

LOTTIE. I thought it might be another of them

THE BANK ACCOUNT

collectors. There's been a procession all the morning.

MAY. Well, they sure have their nerve coming to the front door.

LOTTIE. That's what I say.

MAY. Why don't you make Frank get after them?

LOTTIE [*horried*] Frank? Say, May, if Frank knew I ran a bill he'd — he'd half murder me.

MAY [*tranquilly*] Oh, that's it, is it? Well, every one says Frank's a tightwad. We women certainly have our troubles. Wait till we get the vote.

LOTTIE [*picking up magazine*] These new styles are grand. They're just the thing to set off my figure.

MAY [*glancing at the clock*] My goodness, Lottie, it's after twelve. Shake that kimono and get into your duds. We won't get there now until 1:30. The last time I was late I got terrible cards all the afternoon. That was the day you lost seven-fifty; remember?

LOTTIE. Oh, luck's got to change sometime. I'm about ready, except slipping into my dress. I've been expecting one I ordered yesterday. [*The bell rings.*] You answer it, May. If it's a collector, say I'm out.

MAY [*at the tube*] Hello! [*places hand over the transmitter*] It's from Smith Brothers.

LOTTIE. It's my dress, then. Let him up. I hope they didn't send it C. O. D. [*May pushes the button. Lottie stands in the middle of the*

THE BANK ACCOUNT

room waiting anxiously. There is a knock and May opens the door and takes a box from a boy. The door is shut.]

MAY. Here you are. It's all right. [*Lottie opens the box and takes from it a cheap but rather gay gown, which she holds up.*]

MAY [*admiring it*] That is the very latest, I suppose.

LOTTIE. So they told me.

[*The following conversation is carried on while Lottie hurriedly discards the kimono and slips the gown on over her head. May assists. While May is seeking for hidden hooks and eyes, Lottie snatches up a hand mirror and proceeds to rouge her face.*]

MAY. It's a wonder Frank don't make a holler, seeing how close they say he is. You have twice the dresses I do. Got a pin?

LOTTIE. Lord, Frank don't know. I'll tell him I made it over, or that it cost a dollar seventy-eight — that folds under and catches — Frank's got no idea of women's clothes.

MAY. So that's it. Thought 't was funny — give me another pin — Charlie says down at the office Frank never lets a nickel get away from him. He'd buy you a beer quick's he'd lend you a million.

LOTTIE. It's natural for Frank to be steady — is that going to hang straight?

MAY. Steady? He gets twenty-one a week, does n't he? [*Lottie nods.*] Well, I think he carries it too far. Charlie says that Frank is the only man in his office that carries his lunch —

THE BANK ACCOUNT

this is pretty tight — you ought to get a new corset, dearie, if you 're going to wear this model.

LOTTIE. Frank 's all right, May.

MAY. Oh, I don't blame you for sticking up for him — there 's another hook come off — but what makes me sore on Frank is his bluff about having money in the bank.

LOTTIE [*quickly*] What 's that? Who did he say that to?

MAY. Fact. Told Charlie that he had three thousand in the Coöperative, and was going to quit soon and buy a farm — turn round a little — did you ever hear of such a liar?

LOTTIE [*with real feeling*] My God!

MAY. Why, what 's the matter, dearie? A man 's got a right to a dream, I suppose. They all lie more or less.

LOTTIE [*gasping*] Frank — Frank ain't lying.

MAY. Oh, come off. Three thousand in the bank and you staving off collectors by bunches. Don't you start dreaming, too, Lottie.

LOTTIE. I ain't.

MAY. You mean to tell me that you 've got three thousand in the Coöperative?

LOTTIE. We ain't got a cent, but Frank *believes* we have.

MAY. Is he looney?

LOTTIE. Oh, it 's terrible, but Frank thinks for the last twelve years that I 've put three dollars a week in the Coöperative.

MAY. You don't mean it?

LOTTIE. He gave me all the money, you know. I did try at first, but it slipped through my fingers.

THE BANK ACCOUNT

I could n't do without everything, as he has. [*She begins to cry.*]

MAY. Of course you could n't. He had n't any business to expect you to.

LOTTIE. I kept getting in the hole more and more. You know every time I play I lose, and a woman has *got* to have some clothes.

MAY. There 'll be the devil to pay when Frank finds out.

LOTTIE. I'm scared to death about that. But maybe my luck will change. If I could only put a little back.

MAY. Well, you are in a mess all right. But anyhow I would n't stand too much from Frank. It was as much your money as his. Where 's the collar to this? [*They look for the collar.*]

LOTTIE. I bet they forgot to send it.

MAY. Have n't you got one that 'll do?

LOTTIE. Not a thing. May, would you mind running down to the corner? They 've got some in the window for twenty-nine cents that look fine. I 'll have to powder up again.

MAY. Sure. [*Lottie gives May some change.*] I 'll be right back. And don't worry about Frank. If he ain't found out in twelve years, he won't right away.

Exit May.

Lottie returns rather soberly to restoring her make-up. The door opens and Frank enters. He is about forty-eight, rather tall and slim. He wears a dark moustache and stoops a very little, as one is likely to do who has worked for years indoors over books. He is dressed neatly, but a little shabbily. He has a tin, folding lunch-box

THE BANK ACCOUNT

in his hand. He enters breezily, with his head thrown back. He is smiling broadly, as if at some secret joke. Ordinarily Frank speaks very slowly. Lottie looks at him with the greatest surprise.

LOTTIE. Why, Frank —

FRANK. Hello, old girl. Going out?

LOTTIE. What's the matter? It's only noon.

FRANK [*still enjoying his joke*] Say, that's a pretty dress. Looks just like new.

LOTTIE [*gasping*] I — I — fixed it up. But why are you —

FRANK [*admiring the dress*] It beats all how you do it, Lottie. The rest of 'em may spend the money, but there ain't a woman in the block looks trimmer than you.

LOTTIE. Is any of the firm dead? Have you got the afternoon off?

FRANK. Now, don't be thinking of dismal subjects, Lottie. Every one's chipper, far as I know. [*He tosses his lunch-box on the table.*] I just thought I'd run home and see how you were.

LOTTIE [*eagerly*] Then you *are* going back?

FRANK. I thought a little afternoon off might do us both good.

LOTTIE. Did Mr. Anson give you the afternoon?

FRANK. No, Anson is still in his right mind. I don't recollect his ever giving me an afternoon in the last fifteen years, do you?

LOTTIE [*eagerly*] You have n't been promoted?

FRANK. After fifteen years? No, they don't promote men at my age. They fire 'em.

LOTTIE. You have n't been *discharged*?

THE BANK ACCOUNT

FRANK [*grinning*] Don't look as if I'd been, do I?

LOTTIE. Then, for heaven's sake! tell me what it means! Why are you home?

FRANK. There, there, little girl. Don't you worry. I've a little joke —

LOTTIE. Joke —?

FRANK. Yes, a little joke. Don't you worry. It's the first joke I've had in fifteen years. You just trust me, as I always have you. Everything will be all right.

LOTTIE. But you are so queer.

FRANK. I'm going to tell you all about it pretty soon. I thought you'd have guessed, but I'm glad you did n't. It makes the joke better. That certainly is a pretty dress.

LOTTIE. Frank, I can't stand it! Tell me what has happened. I've got to know! You're torturing me!

FRANK. Why, Lottie, I did n't mean to do that. I was n't going to tell you so soon. But don't you know what day this is?

LOTTIE. No.

FRANK. It's our anniversary.

LOTTIE. We were married in March.

FRANK. I know. But another anniversary. Can't you remember?

LOTTIE [*shaking her head*] No, I can't.

FRANK. That's funny. You've been so busy saving and scrimping and making our house nice, you forget the very thing we were saving for.

LOTTIE [*suddenly remembering*] Oh!

THE BANK ACCOUNT

FRANK. It's twelve years to-day since we started in with the Coöperative. Remember?

LOTTIE. Yes — I — had forgotten.

FRANK. Oh, you need n't feel bad about it. I'm glad you did. You've had your nose so down to the grindstone, you ain't had much time to think about anything else. I had only the office, and I guess there ain't been a minute in the twelve years *this* day's been out of *my* mind.

LOTTIE [*faintly*] I — I — did n't know you'd been keeping track.

FRANK. Bless you, I did n't have to keep track. We knew when we started in that three dollars a week for twelve years, with the little we had, would be three thousand dollars. We knew that, did n't we?

LOTTIE. Yes — oh, yes.

FRANK. And that's why I'm not going back to work this afternoon or any other afternoon! We can have our farm now. I've been talking with some real estate fellers, and have got two or three places all ready for you to look at. Think of it, Lottie! It's been pretty hard, but we're *there* now! We've got the cash! We're independent!

LOTTIE. Yes — yes — I know.

FRANK. To-morrow we'll start looking for the farm. But this afternoon we'll have a little bust ourselves. Wan't going any place in particular, were you?

LOTTIE. Oh, no. That is, May Harding and I were going to play bridge.

THE BANK ACCOUNT

FRANK. I guess my little time will be better. You ain't been to lunch, have you?

LOTTIE. No, but —

FRANK. Neither have I. It's been a good many years since I was in a restaurant, but I saw a little place the other day that looked reasonable and good. Then we'd go to the movies, or maybe a real show, if you'd rather.

LOTTIE. But — May will expect me to go with her. She's gone down to the store on an errand for me.

FRANK. Is that so? [*Slowly.*] Well, I suppose we could take her too. It would n't cost much more, though I'd sort of reckoned on you and me having this afternoon to ourselves.

LOTTIE [*hesitatingly*] I think May would rather play cards.

FRANK. Nonsense! No one would rather sit round and play cards with make-believe-money when they could go to the movies. I've never been but twice, but to-day we'll go to two or three, if you want to.

LOTTIE. I'll — I'll ask her.

FRANK. That's the talk. I know you're worrying about the expense. You've got so in the habit it's hard to get out of it, but I guess we can have a little celebration once in twelve years. We'll take May. It will do her good. The Hardings are going to be up against it pretty soon.

LOTTIE. Is n't Charlie doing all right?

FRANK. It ain't that. But they ain't got a

THE BANK ACCOUNT

cent, and Charlie's as old as I am. I'm sorry for the Hardings.

LOTTIE [*nervously picks up lunch-box*] But you — you carried this to-day?

FRANK [*laughing*] Part of my joke. I knew you'd forgot when you packed that this morning. [*Slides back cover and takes out two sandwiches and a slice of cake, then folds box.*] The boys have laughed at this lunch-box for twelve years, but I guess it's my turn to laugh now. No more lunch-boxes for mine! When we get our little farm we're going to be some cozy, I tell you. [*Frank sits and elaborately pulls a cigar from his pocket. He holds it up to Lottie.*]

FRANK. See that? First cigar since we started in with the Coöperative. When you and me were courting, I used to smoke quite a few of these, but they had to go. Why, do you know, when I've had 'em given to me I ain't smoked 'em for fear of getting the taste. [*He lights the cigar and settles back with the greatest enjoyment. He smokes, but holds the cigar in an amateurish way.*] Suppose we might as well make ourselves comfortable while we're waiting for May. You're all ready, ain't you?

LOTTIE. Only for the collar. May has gone to get one.

FRANK. I tell you, Lottie, not many women would have stuck by me as you have done.

LOTTIE [*gasping*] Oh, please!

FRANK. Fact. It takes a lot of grit to stint yourself and go without things other folks are having. I suppose in a way it's been harder for you

THE BANK ACCOUNT

than for me, although I ain't had it too easy. Let 's see, I 'm forty-eight now, so I must have been thirty-six when we started in with the bank. I seen then there wan't no chance with the firm. Do you remember the night we talked it over? [*Lottie nods.*] You could n't see at first how we could save three dollars out of twenty-one, did you?

LOTTIE. No — I did n't.

FRANK. But you see I was right, and now it 's all over, you 're glad as I am, ain't you?

LOTTIE. Of — of course.

FRANK [*smoking*] I tell you, Lottie, I 'm sorry for those other fellers. It 's an awful thing to go in every morning and wonder if you 're going to get the blue envelope. When a man 's in his twenties and thirties, he 's pretty cocky towards his boss, and pretty frequent asking for raises, but after he 's forty, the only thing he worries about is holding his job. You 've got to smile at the boss, and you 've got to take things which take all the manhood out of you 'cause there 's your family. One little word from the boss and away goes the pretty little home you 've made, and maybe there won't be even food enough for your wife to eat.

LOTTIE. Many men don't ever lose their jobs.

FRANK. Mighty few, and don't you see they 're never *sure*. I see it in the eyes of Harding and the rest of 'em now. They make a bluff and most often their wives don't know, but I tell you they don't dare breathe till they get their pay every week. They don't know *when* they 'll get

THE BANK ACCOUNT

the blue envelope, but they know mighty well it will be some day, that's *sure*.

LOTTIE. I—I didn't know how hard it—it is.

FRANK. *Is?* Was for me. But you see all the time I knew the bank account was rolling up, and every year I would be so much nearer freedom for me, and safety for you, girl. I give you credit! You never complained.

LOTTIE. I did complain at first.

FRANK. Only for a year or so. Then you settled right down to business with never a whimper, as I knew you would. God bless you! [*Lottie begins to cry a little.*] It's most too much for you, I guess, to feel it's all over. Do you know the reason I went to work this morning and took my lunch-box and never said a word?

LOTTIE. W—why—?

FRANK. It's like this. I never was much of a favorite with old Anson, you know. If he'd been a decent boss, I might never have thought of the Coöperative. I never said much about it to you, but every year old Anson has been getting after me worse and worse. I've kept my mouth shut, although often I've bit my lips till they bled. I suppose sometimes you thought I was peevish about being afraid of being late. Anson was the reason. Why, if I'd been five minutes behind during the past ten years, he might have fired me. It was just the same about the accounts. I worked late lots of times so he would n't have any excuse. We could n't afford to have me out of a job until we got the three thousand, you see.

THE BANK ACCOUNT

LOTTIE. I — I did n't realize.

FRANK. If it was n't for the thought of the Coöperative, I never would have been able to stand it. But every time he insulted me, I thought of that. It saved me. At first I thought that when we got the three thousand, I'd wait outside and beat him up.

LOTTIE. Frank — !

FRANK. Oh, that was only at first. Then for three or four years I had it in my mind to call him down before the whole office and walk out.

LOTTIE. You did n't do that?

FRANK. No, after that I took to writing those letters. You used to wonder what they were. [*Frank goes to the clock and takes from back of it letters, then settles back in his chair.*] You see, the scheme is this, Lottie. When I don't show up all afternoon old Anson will see he's got a good chance to fire me, and he'll plan the rest of the day the fine bawling out he'll give me to-morrow, before the whole office, before he gives me the chuck. He'll be tickled to death with the chance. But there ain't going to be any bawling out, 'cause in the morning he's going to get a letter from me throwing up the job.

LOTTIE. Oh, you must n't!

FRANK. Sure; why not? I've planned this too long. I've written this letter fifty times. When Anson has been particularly nasty, them's been the nights I've come home and practised letter writing. It's been a relief. [*He rips open some of the letters.*] The first letters are pretty long. I got to making 'em shorter. Here's the

THE BANK ACCOUNT

last one. I thought it a corker. Anson will just writhe. Want to hear it?

LOTTIE. Not now.

FRANK. You don't?

LOTTIE. Yes; oh, yes, I mean.

FRANK. Here it is. "Mr. Beefy Anson" — they call him "Beefy" behind his back, that will make him sore to start — "Manager of Corey and Swift Co. Sir: You can keep your job. I don't need the money. Yours, Frank Benson." [*Frank laughs uproariously.*] Ain't that a peach? Short, and to the point. I'll mail it when we go out.

LOTTIE [*nervously*] But, Frank, do — do you think you ought to quit now?

FRANK [*shows bent forefinger*] See that finger? Bent holding a pen. That's just the way my brain is, all cramped up with figures. I could n't stand it another month. I want to get out in the open. Get these figures out of my brain. The pen is getting a little too small for me, but I guess I can still get a good grip on a hoe handle. I'm getting out just in time. They've got no use for men sliding past middle age in the big offices. The young fellers are quicker. But in the country we older ones will get a square deal. God grows things just as quick for the man of fifty as he does for the youngsters. [*He gets up and stretches himself.*] I know now how the slaves felt when Abe Lincoln read that little piece to them. But mind you, Lottie, you're going to have the choice of the farms. Suppose you'll miss the city much?

LOTTIE. I — I don't know.

THE BANK ACCOUNT

FRANK. You won't. Think of it. Everything we'll touch will be our own. No landlords, no boss Ansons; we can grow old with nary a fear of want, 'cause every year we'll set out new things and they'll be growing and taking care of us just as if they were our children. Got a stamp for this letter?

LOTTIE. No, I don't think so.

FRANK. We'll get one when we go out. Say, Lottie, we might as well go by the Coöperative and tell 'em we're going to draw out. You have to give 'em some notice, I suppose, don't you?

LOTTIE. I — I suppose so.

FRANK. Would you mind getting the bank-book? I don't even know where you keep it. That was your part of the job. I never interfered with you no more 'n you did with me. But I would kind of like to see it now.

[*Lottie suddenly flings herself at Frank's feet, sobbing hysterically. Frank looks at her astonished.*]

FRANK. Why — why what's the matter? [*Lottie continues to sob. Frank passes his hand over her head soothingly.*] There — there. I should n't have surprised you so. You are all keyed up, of course. We're getting out just in time for both of us.

LOTTIE [*sobbing*] Forgive me, Frank — forgive me!

FRANK [*soothing her*] There — there.

LOTTIE. Oh, I did n't mean to — I did n't — I could u't help it.

THE BANK ACCOUNT

FRANK. Why, what's the matter? There ain't nothing wrong, is there?

LOTTIE. I wish you would kill me!

FRANK. Why, what are you talking about? You're just overwrought. There ain't nothing wrong. Come, get the bank-book. [*Trying to cheer her.*] Sight of three thousand dollars will cheer you up a bit, I'm thinking.

LOTTIE [*gasping*] There — there ain't three thousand dollars.

FRANK [*not taking it in*] There ain't. Why, I thought it would amount to that.

LOTTIE [*impetuously*] I could n't do it. I had to have things. I *had* to. You could n't understand. A woman has to have things.

FRANK. I — I — well maybe — I —

[*Frank gets up without heeding Lottie. She continues to cling to the chair. Frank walks across the room and back, mastering his disappointment.*]

LOTTIE. I wish you would kill me!

FRANK. I'm — I'm a little disappointed. But maybe we could get along with less. We could get a cheaper farm. Only I'd — I'd sort of set my heart on having just the three thousand. How much is gone? [*Lottie breaks forth into more violent sobbing.*]

FRANK. It can't be very much. A hundred dollars would buy a lot of things. Is it more 'n a hundred short? [*Lottie sobs.*] Is it?

LOTTIE. Yes, yes. I — I — oh, Frank, I wish I were dead.

[*A glimmer of the real truth comes to Frank.*

THE BANK ACCOUNT

He strides over to Lottie, seizes her shoulders and whirls her about. His voice, which has betrayed only keen disappointment, is now broken by agony.]

FRANK. Look at me! How much is gone? How much? When did it begin? Answer me! [*He shakes her.*]

LOTTIE. From — from the first.

FRANK. From the first? My God! Lottie, do you know what you are saying? Is there more than a thousand gone? [*She nods.*] More than a thousand! Then how much? How much is left?

LOTTIE [*in an outburst*] It's — it's all gone! We have n't a dollar!

[*Lottie falls from Frank's loosened grasp. Frank presses his hands to his head. At last, like a blind man, he stretches forth his hand towards the woman. His voice is scarcely more than a whisper.*]

FRANK. Lottie, it ain't true? You — you've been joking with me — say it ain't true — say it, Lottie! *Something's left.*

[*Lottie does not answer. Frank staggers back and sits down, burying his face in his hands. For a moment there is no sound, save the suppressed sobbing of the woman. Frank lifts his head. He acts dazed.*]

FRANK [*half to himself*] I guess I've hoped for too much. No farm — no country — only — only old Anson and —

[*He tries to straighten out his bent forefinger, then mechanically fits a pencil into it and goes through the motions of attempting to write on*

THE BANK ACCOUNT

the palm of his left hand. The clock strikes one. Frank glances up startled, then springs to his feet. He walks over to the kneeling Lottie and places his hand on her shoulder.]

LOTTIE [*shrieking*] Oh, don't hurt me, Frank!

FRANK [*slowly*] I—I ain't going to. You could n't help it. But—but—it's one o'clock. [*He crosses over, opens lunch-box and puts food back in it.*] I'll—I'll be a little late, I guess.

[*Frank is going rapidly out as May enters. He does not speak to her. May looks at Frank's set, hopeless face, then at the kneeling woman, and comprehends the situation.*] *Exit Frank:*

MAY [*going to Lottie*] So he knows?

LOTTIE. Y-yes.

MAY [*comforting her*] And goes off leaving you like this? Are n't men the brutes!

[*May rests one hand on Lottie's shoulder, and as she speaks the last words, stands glaring belligerently at the door through which Frank has just passed.*]

CURTAIN

THE RESCUE

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

BY

RITA CREIGHTON SMITH

CHARACTERS

MISS ELVIRA WARDEN

ANNA WARDEN

KATE

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THE RESCUE

SCENE: *The living room of the Warden House: a dignified, gloomy, old-fashioned room with ugly, dark wall paper, hung with family portraits in tarnished frames. One of these, the portrait of an elderly man, hangs above the mantel at the left of the back wall, with a branched candlestick before it. The door into the hall, closed, is at back right: an open door down left leads to the back of the house. Opposite this door in the right wall is a long, old-fashioned mirror. A deep arm-chair is near this mirror; an old high desk by the hall door; a small work table piled with black sewing at the back. Near the fireplace stands a low table with a lighted lamp, but neither this nor the fire burning in the grate can dispel the gloomy impression of the room.*

Miss Elvira Warden, a gentle, faded, elderly lady in black, sits embroidering by the lamp; she is depressed and nervous. She rises and goes to the open door left.

MISS ELVIRA [*calling*] Kate! Kate!

KATE [*outside, left*] I'm comin'. [*Kate appears in the door: a sturdy, elderly woman, wearing a white apron over a plain, dark-colored dress.*] You want somethin', Miss Elviry?

MISS ELVIRA. No. I want you to come in and

THE RESCUE

sit with me. [*Resumes her sewing.*] I'm — lonesome.

KATE [*sits, stiffly erect*] Course you be. It's the first evenin' Miss Anna's ben out sence she come, ain't it?

MISS ELVIRA. You know I have n't been able to *get* her out, Kate. Even to the neighbors'.

KATE. Well, she was all wore out, nursin' her mother so long.

MISS ELVIRA. And her grief has n't seemed to lessen any; it's grown worse. And now — oh, Kate! Does n't it seem dreadful to you?

KATE [*stolidly*] What?

MISS ELVIRA. You know! Anna's rushing off like this, to this — party.

KATE. No, it don't. It ain't right for young folks to go on mournin' all their days.

MISS ELVIRA. I know — I know! If she'd begun seeing people gradually, in a natural way, it would have made me happy. But a large party! With — dancing, Kate! And Anna in her deep mourning! And not one word of warning to me till supper time! Kate, you know it's not — natural.

KATE. No, I don't. I'm glad she's got spunk enough left to break loose. Miss Elviry, anythin' she wants to do to git out and be like other young folks, you egg her on!

MISS ELVIRA. Oh, if I could make her like other young people! But, Kate — Anna's a Warden.

KATE. That's why! — So be you a Warden.

THE RESCUE

If you go on frettin' like this, you won't sleep to-night.

MISS ELVIRA. I know. I will be sensible. Kate, you think it 'll come out right? That I'm just a silly old woman, worrying about — the only thing I've got left to me?

KATE. Yes, Miss Elvira, I do.

MISS ELVIRA. Oh, I hope you're right! But after all the things that you and I have seen in this house —

KATE. Mullin' over what's past ain't the way to help Miss Anna.

MISS ELVIRA [*suddenly, listening*] Kate!

KATE. What?

MISS ELVIRA. I hear steps — on the walk!

KATE. It's her!

MISS ELVIRA. And it's not ten o'clock yet! Oh, Kate —

KATE. I'll go back.

MISS ELVIRA. No — no — stay! We must act perfectly natural — as if we did n't suspect — [*The opening of the outer door is heard. Miss Elvira snatches her embroidery, but her shaking hands will hardly draw the needle. Kate sits as before, bolt upright. Anna Warden opens the door at back and stands looking at them, wrapped in her evening cloak.*] Good evening, dear.

KATE. Well, Miss Anna. You're home early. [*Without answering, Anna crosses and sits in the long arm chair. After a moment she breaks into low nervous laughter.*]

MISS ELVIRA. Anna! What is it?

ANNA. Aunt Elvira! You're funny! You and

THE RESCUE

Kate sit here — as if I came home from parties — two hours early — every night in the week!

MISS ELVIRA [*going to her, all her anxiety betrayed*] Oh, my dear! Tell me what has happened!

ANNA. Nothing.

MISS ELVIRA. Nothing?

ANNA [*rising and shrinking from her touch*] Nothing at all. [*She goes to the fireplace.*] I got tired of sitting here and thinking about — everything in creation. They asked me to this party. I thought I'd try it; perhaps I'd have a good time. [*Sharply*] Is n't that — natural?

MISS ELVIRA. Yes, dear, yes! And then?

ANNA. Then — I did n't have a good time. So I came home. That's all.

MISS ELVIRA [*soothingly*] Of course! I understand perfectly. [*Anna throws off her cloak. She wears a simple black evening dress, with a great red artificial flower.*] Oh — Anna!

ANNA. What? [*Touching the flower.*] Oh — this? That's another experiment. Mother would n't have wanted me to wear black for her, anyhow. She hated gloomy things. But don't worry; I shan't try it again. [*She flings the flower on the fire. Kate, without hurry, comes and plucks it off.*] You need n't.

✓ KATE. 'T would make a smell. I'll look out for it, Miss Anna. [*Kate goes out left, taking the flower. A pause.*]

ANNA. Aunt Elvira.

MISS ELVIRA. Yes, dear?

ANNA. Who was Emmeline Warden?

THE RESCUE

MISS ELVIRA [*startled, after a moment*] She was your aunt. My sister, and your father's.

ANNA. Why have n't I heard about her? You tell me a lot about grandfather, the governor [*indicating the portrait over the mantel*], and Judge Warden, and the others.

MISS ELVIRA. I suppose I have n't happened to. It's so long since she passed away.

ANNA [*bringing her a photograph album from the table*] Show me her picture, please.

MISS ELVIRA [*turning the leaves irresolutely*] I don't believe — there is n't any picture of her here.

ANNA. That's queer, is n't it? Did n't she have any pictures taken? Was she so hideous?

MISS ELVIRA. No, no! She was — a very pretty girl.

ANNA. Come, Aunt Elvie! You've a picture of her tucked away somewhere! You would n't destroy it — your own sister's picture! That would n't be — natural. Find it, please.

MISS ELVIRA. Well, I don't know — I may have. [*Reluctantly and irresolutely she goes to the desk.*]

ANNA. There are a great many things hidden away in the Warden house, are n't there?

MISS ELVIRA [*takes a photograph from a drawer, and forced by Anna's eyes, hands it to her*] There!

ANNA [*studying it intently*] Aunt Emmeline! — Did she die here, in this house?

MISS ELVIRA. Yes. She'd been away — she

THE RESCUE

was married; but when she began to — not to feel well, she came home.

ANNA. Before I was born, was n't it?

MISS ELVIRA. Oh, years before. She was only twenty-eight.

ANNA. I'm learning. [*Softly*] You have n't said yet what she died of.

MISS ELVIRA [*nervous*] She — had been ill — a long time. Nearly two years.

ANNA. Yes? What was her illness?

MISS ELVIRA. The doctors did n't — did n't know as much in those days.

ANNA. Did n't they have a name for it? [*No answer.*] I think I'll put Aunt Emmeline back where she belongs. I've been wondering what that empty place was for. [*As she puts the photograph into the album, Kate enters, left, with a tray of supper.*] Look, Kate! Aunt Elvie has found Aunt Emmeline's picture. She had — mislaid it.

KATE. I s'pose somebody to your party has been tellin' you you look like Miss Emmeline. [*Miss Elvira makes a startled gesture of protest.*]

ANNA. Oh, no, Kate! Nobody said a word — to me. I only heard them when they thought I was n't there.

KATE. Well, it ain't so. [*Miss Elvira starts, surprised; Anna is interested.*] They think you do, because she had dark hair like you, an' she used to wear black and red. You favor your mother's folks.

ANNA. Do I?

KATE. Yes. Mebbe that don't please you —

THE RESCUE

they were n't as high up as the Wardens. You know I was kin to your mother myself, way off.

ANNA. I should like to be like my mother.

KATE. Well, you be. Now you draw up here and have somethin' to eat. You run off without a mite of supper, an' I don't s'pose you stayed to your party till the refreshments come round. You know you 're hungry.

ANNA [*in a more natural manner*] Am I? Maybe I am. You're good to me, Kate. [*Sits by the table and begins to eat.*] Don't you want some, Aunt Elvie?

MISS ELVIRA. No, dear, thank you. [*Sharply*] Kate! How often have I told you not to use those kitchen knives!

KATE. Oh, laws — I forgot! Here, give it here an' I'll git you a silver one.

ANNA. I like this. It cuts, and it's got a regular point on it, has n't it? [*She holds up the knife to look at it, in idle curiosity.*]

MISS ELVIRA [*rising, unable to hide her agitation*] Anna! Please — put it down!

ANNA. Aunt Elvie!

MISS ELVIRA. I can't help it, dear. It's — an antipathy. Your father had it too.

ANNA. Oh, it's a Warden trait, is it? Don't any of us like — sharp knives, with points? [*With a new, horrible curiosity, she sketches a slight gesture with the knife. Miss Elvira flinches.*] I should never have thought of that, Aunt Elvie. [*Putting down the knife and speaking abruptly.*] Take it out, Kate. And take the

THE RESCUE

rest of the things, please. I'm not hungry.
[*Kate takes out the tray, left.*]

MISS ELVIRA. I'm so sorry, dear, to be foolish.

ANNA. Nonsense! We can't help the way we're made, can we? I'm learning that, all the time. Go on with your sewing; I'll get mine.
[*She brings a great pile of black sewing from the work table.*] See how much I've got started! Three dresses!

MISS ELVIRA. All at once?

ANNA [*going to work with energy*] Oh, I'm going to sew and sew! All my own clothes — yours, too, Aunt Elvie! I shan't try going out again, and I've got to have something to do, have n't I, besides — thinking? I believe I'll sit up all night and make a real start.

MISS ELVIRA. Oh, Anna, dear!

ANNA. Why not? I'm not sleepy.

MISS ELVIRA. But, dear, if the neighbors saw lights in this room all night!

ANNA. That's so, the neighbors are watching, are n't they? Lifting up the corner of the shade towards the Warden House — waiting — Well, let's give them a little pleasure.

MISS ELVIRA. Oh, Anna, I do want to do right by you! I suppose this little place is dull for you, after New York. I don't realize it; I was born here.

ANNA. So was I. Sometimes I wish Mother'd never taken me away, after Father died.

MISS ELVIRA. Do you, dear?

ANNA. Then I should be used to it.

THE RESCUE

MISS ELVIRA. Now supposing you and I take a little trip to Boston for a week or two.

ANNA. What for?

MISS ELVIRA. For change and recreation. And — you're still a little bit run down, dear. Oh, you're better — a great deal better! But in Boston you might consult a really good doctor.

ANNA. A brain doctor?

MISS ELVIRA. No, dear, no — of course not! One who could give you a little something for your nerves.

ANNA. I don't want a doctor! Aunt Elvira, promise me you won't make me go to a doctor.

MISS ELVIRA. Of course I won't.

ANNA. I don't want to go to Boston, or anywhere. [*Going to the desk.*] Here, I'll show you. [*Gets a letter and gives it to Miss Elvira. Kate appears, left, with a small lamp.*] Come in, Kate, it's no secret now.

MISS ELVIRA. Who is this from?

ANNA. The firm I worked for in New York, two years ago before Mother was sick. I wrote to see if they'd take me back.

MISS ELVIRA. And did n't tell me!

ANNA. Oh, that was a long while ago — two months! You remember the time I got — restless?

MISS ELVIRA. Yes.

ANNA. I thought then if I stayed here another day I should stifle. So I wrote, and — they did n't answer.

MISS ELVIRA. But this —?

ANNA. That came last Friday. Mr. Carson

THE RESCUE

was away, it seems. Now he's back, and — it's too late.

KATE. Why is it too late?

MISS ELVIRA. Kate!

KATE. He's got a job for you?

ANNA. Yes, a good one, in the private office. He's holding it open till to-morrow.

KATE. Miss Anna, you go.

MISS ELVIRA. Kate! [*To Anna*] What have you written to him?

ANNA. I have n't. I was fool enough to wonder — if I could —

KATE. 'Course you could! That's all you want, to git away from here, an' work.

ANNA. Could I work, now? Do you think I could run a typewriter with that? [*Holds up her hand, which is shaking nervously.*]

KATE. Yes!

ANNA [*appealing, between hope and fear*] Aunt Elvie?

MISS ELVIRA. Oh, my dear! Don't ask me! It does n't seem wise for you — just yet — to go among strangers.

ANNA [*her excitement and hope ebbing*] Strangers! No, I could n't stand them. You're right, Aunt Elvie. Noise — and crowds — and confusion — and seeing them wonder —

MISS ELVIRA. Stay here a little longer, among your own people.

ANNA [*with a long look about the room, in final acceptance*] Among — my own people! Yes. You'll keep me?

THE RESCUE

MISS ELVIRA. My dear — always! We're all the Wardens there are left now.

KATE. I brung your lamp, Miss Elviry. It's past your bedtime.

MISS ELVIRA. Is it? But I'm not sleepy — [*Kate puts the lamp into her hand. Yielding, she takes a step towards the door.*] You'll lock up?

KATE. Yes. [*Kate goes out, left.*]

MISS ELVIRA. Anna, you won't sit up late?

ANNA. No.

MISS ELVIRA. Good-night. I'm glad you're — liking it better here. By and by you will be rested. [*She goes out back.*]

ANNA [*to the closed door*] By and by I shall be — [*She snatches the album, carries it to the table and sits turning the leaves. On a sound at the door she draws her sewing quickly over the book. Miss Elvira re-enters hastily, and without looking at Anna begins rummaging in the desk.*] Forgotten something?

MISS ELVIRA. Yes. That is — I've mislaid something I must have.

ANNA. Perhaps I can help if you tell me.

MISS ELVIRA. It's nothing. I was sure I put it away in my bureau, carefully, but I might have put it here.

ANNA. Was it — in a bottle?

MISS ELVIRA. Anna! You've seen it?

ANNA. Tell me what it was.

MISS ELVIRA. My sleeping tablets. You know I almost never take anything — but the doctor says — when I am agitated — just one. — Oh, Anna! Did you find them?

THE RESCUE

ANNA. Yes. I saw you hiding something away so carefully, I was curious.

MISS ELVIRA. I don't believe in leaving such dangerous things about, where anybody might find them.

ANNA. Meaning — Kate?

MISS ELVIRA. Where are they?

ANNA [*producing a small bottle from her sewing basket*] Here. I was going to put it back.

MISS ELVIRA [*taking the bottle eagerly*] Oh — thank you! [*Going out, she glances at the bottle and hesitates.*] I thought it was — fuller.

ANNA. Did you?

MISS ELVIRA. Anna!

ANNA. No, Aunt Elvira, I have n't taken any. I thought of it. I should like to sleep too.

MISS ELVIRA. Oh, Anna, you must n't! They're so dangerous!

ANNA. I have n't had a single one. [*Miss Elvira studies her face, which is impenetrable, defiant.*] I don't see but you might as well believe me.

MISS ELVIRA. Of course, I believe you, dear! Good-night. [*Terribly anxious, but unable to overcome her own hesitation, Miss Elvira goes reluctantly out at back, closing the door. Anna piles away her sewing in untidy haste; opens the album once more; then goes to the mantel, lights the candles before the portrait, and studies it intently. Carrying the candlestick, she goes about the room studying all the pictures. Lastly she goes to the long mirror, and, holding the candlestick high, searches her own face with somber in-*

THE RESCUE

tensity. Something she sees in the mirror makes her wheel sharply. Kate is standing in the open door opposite, watching her. Still holding the candles high, Anna confronts her.]

ANNA. Kate! Which of them am I?

KATE. You can take your pick. There's your grandpa, the governor; an' the old judge — he was one of the smartest men in the state, they say. Your father, Mr. Edward — [*as she speaks she indicates the portraits*].

ANNA. Go on! There are — the others. [*Pointing*] My grandmother: I know about her: she was —

KATE. Yes, she was crazy, quite a few years 'fore she died.

ANNA. And great-uncle Joshua: he hanged himself.

KATE. To a beam in the garret.

ANNA [*pointing to the album*] Tell me about her — Emmeline. Tell me the truth.

KATE. She was sick, an' she got it into her head she was goin' like her mother. So she got holt of a knife and stabbed herself.

ANNA. I knew! Thank you, Kate. [*Relaxing, with a deep breath as of relief.*] You're a strange woman. How do you dare say these things to me, straight out? — "crazy" and "stabbed herself"? Why don't you whisper and watch me out of the corner of your eyes, and jump when I turn round?

KATE. I guess I have n't told you any news.

ANNA. No. I know — more than anyone. Nobody has to tell me what the Wardens were.

THE RESCUE

They 're in here [*making a gesture to her breast*], whispering to me, pulling me this way and that way!

KATE. I don't believe you ever felt 'em till you come back.

ANNA. Is n't that strange! I thought I was like other people. I had black moods — awful ones — but they passed. I was working —

KATE. You was with your mother.

ANNA. Yes.

KATE. You 're your mother's child, too, Anna.

ANNA. Not any more. I 'm all Warden. Kate, I 'm forgetting what Mother looked like. I can't hear her laugh.

KATE. Anna, you git out o' here!

ANNA. What would be the use? I can't get *them* out.

KATE. You belong to your mother's folks, an' we 're fighters.

ANNA. I have fought! I 'm past that. All I have to do now is — to wait. *They 'll* make what they want to of me. [*Kate, turned from her, laughs harshly. Anna recoils in horror.*] Kate! What do you —? You laughed!

KATE. Yes.

ANNA. I thought — you were the one real person in this house. Are you — a Warden, too?

KATE. It 's enough to make a corpse laugh, the things folks build up out of their own heads. You ain't any o' these Wardens. You 're yourself, a young, strong, pretty girl that had ought to be out in the world, workin' and laughin' and havin' beaux.

THE RESCUE

ANNA [*lying in the long chair, exhausted*] It's no use. I know. And they know.

KATE. Oh, Lord! Can't I make you see? It ain't possible for any of 'em to be workin' and pullin' on you, without you started 'em yourself. [*She looks at the girl's lifeless figure and closed eyes; draws nearer and speaks slowly and solemnly.*] I'm a-goin' to tell you somethin'.

ANNA [*not stirring or opening her eyes*] Well? [*Kate is silent.*] Go on. [*Opening her eyes.*] It must be something pretty bad if you're afraid to say it.

KATE. The Lord forgive me if I'm doin' wrong! — Anna, you loved your mother, did n't you?

ANNA [*sitting up*] You know I did!

KATE. That's right, I do know. So did I love her. She was only a fur-off cousin, but I felt as if she was my niece or somethin'. — You knew her pretty well? You two was sort o' like — friends?

ANNA. She was the best friend anyone ever had.

KATE. I thought so. So — there is n't anythin' anyone could say that could make you think bad of her?

ANNA [*starting to her feet*] Did you come here to slander my mother to me?

KATE. No, Anna — no. I could n't think any harm of her, neither. — Did you ever see your family Bible?

ANNA. What do you mean?

KATE. That leaf that has the marriages an'

THE RESCUE

births an' things — where it tells the day your mother was married, and — the day you was born.

ANNA. Oh, yes — I know. Do you think I blame my mother for that? She was just a little young girl — so much younger than I am now. And she was ignorant — and I suppose she cared. And then at the last my father was honorable, after all.

KATE. Do you remember him — Mr. Edward?

ANNA. Hardly. He seemed old to me, and always so sad. And kind.

KATE. Real kind. Not the sort of a man you 'd expect to lead a girl wrong, Anna.

ANNA. You can't tell, I suppose.

KATE. Real kind. And not very young. And lived neighbor to your mother, and fond of her. And — sorry for her, when he see she was — in trouble.

ANNA [*crying out*] Kate! What are you trying to tell me?

KATE. Yes, Anna.

ANNA. Oh, no — no! [*Anna breaks into tears. Kate draws her to her bosom, soothing her awkwardly.*]

KATE. S-sh! There, there — don't!

ANNA. Oh, poor Mother! Poor little girl!

KATE. Nothin' 's any worse than 't was. 'T ain't as if she 'd ever deceived Mr. Edward. He knew from the start. He married her so 's to help her. An' she was a real good wife to him.

ANNA. She was good to everybody. She was good.

KATE. Yes, she was good.

THE RESCUE

ANNA. Kate, does anybody know?

KATE. Not a soul. Nobody never did, but Mr. Edward and me.

ANNA. And — he. Who was he, Kate — my father?

KATE. I do' know. Somebody away from here, I guess. Somebody she thought the world of — a stranger.

ANNA. A stranger! I can't take it in yet. It makes the world all different. I thought I knew where I was, and I'm — a stranger. — Kate! Aunt Elvie!

KATE. She don't know a thing.

ANNA. No, no — she must n't, ever! But — I'm living on her.

KATE. She don't begrudge you.

ANNA. She thinks I'm her own — the last Warden. And I'm not a Warden at all. I — [*For the first time the real meaning of it strikes her. She looks round at the portraits, saying slowly to them*] I — am not — a Warden! And I've let you draw a net around me. I've let you hunt me — to the edge! [*A terrible hysterical laughter growing on her.*] Kate, it's funny! I want to laugh!

KATE [*putting forth all her power*] No, you don't!

ANNA [*looks in Kate's face, battles with her hysteria, and masters it*] No. I don't have to laugh. I am not a Warden. [*She rises, drawing herself up as if casting a weight from her shoulders, and casts a firm, defiant glance at the portraits.*] I am not a Warden! [*She goes quickly*

THE RESCUE

to the door at back. Flinging it open, she comes on Miss Elvira just outside.] Oh — Aunt Elvie! Let me pass, please. [Gently and firmly, Anna puts her aside and goes out. Kate draws Miss Elvira, greatly agitated, into the room and shuts the door.]

MISS ELVIRA. Oh, Kate, how could you!

KATE. You heard?

MISS ELVIRA. I was so worried. Oh — how terrible! I must go to her.

KATE. No. Anna wants to be alone.

MISS ELVIRA. But in her state, it's enough to make her — make her —

KATE. Kill herself? If she wants to kill herself, she's goin' ter.

MISS ELVIRA. Kate, I don't know you!

KATE. I done what I thought was right.

MISS ELVIRA. You've known this all these years, and kept it from everyone! I can't believe it, even now. Why, Kate, I remember the day Edward broke it to me, that he was going to marry the girl.

KATE. 'T was n't likely he'd tell you, was it?

MISS ELVIRA. How did *you* know, Kate? Did she tell you herself? [*Kate is silent.*] Oh, I can't help thinking there is some mistake! [*Miss Elvira starts towards the door. Kate intercepts her quickly.*]

KATE. Where you goin'?

MISS ELVIRA. To tell Anna I don't believe it!

KATE. You hold still!

MISS ELVIRA. But I'm sure you're wrong.

THE RESCUE

KATE. I'm not wrong. [*Still Miss Elvira does not yield.*] I lied to her.

MISS ELVIRA. You — lied?

KATE. Yes.

MISS ELVIRA. But — why?

KATE. To give her her chance! Ain't it enough she's born with the Wardens inside of her, without havin' 'em crammed down her throat every hour o' the day? Folks watchin' her, watchin' her, to see when she begins to go crazy? An' her a-watchin'?

MISS ELVIRA. But Kate — this other, awful thing! The stain — on all of us! Oh, I must tell her!

KATE [*drawing back to give her passage*] Tell her then. If you love them dead pictures more 'n you do her, I can't stop you — kill her! — She's comin' now. [*Anna opens the door at back and enters, in hat and coat, carrying a small traveling bag. She is under intense excitement, but rules it with a poise quite new to her.*]

MISS ELVIRA. Anna! You're going out?

ANNA. I'm taking the night train for New York.

KATE. To take that job?

ANNA. Yes. [*To Miss Elvira.*] I had to make up my mind quickly. You don't mind sending on my things?

KATE. I'll pack 'em to-morrow.

ANNA. Thank you, Kate. [*With meaning.*] Thank you. Good-bye.

KATE. Good-bye, Anna. [*They clasp hands a moment strongly. Anna turns to Miss Elvira.*]

THE RESCUE

ANNA. Aunt Elvie — I'm sorry — you *have* been sweet to me.

MISS ELVIRA. Oh, Anna! You can't go — like this — [*She clings to her.*]

ANNA [*with real tenderness*] I must. It's all right, dear. See. [*She gives her a small twist of paper.*] The rest of your sleeping tablets. I'm not going to need them now. [*She meets Kate's eyes, as Kate nods in understanding. Anna gently disengages herself.*] I'll write, Aunt Elvie, as soon as I've settled myself. [*Anna goes out.*]

MISS ELVIRA [*still wavering, with an impulse to stop her*] Oh, Kate! She's all alone!

KATE [*in solemn triumph*] Yes. She's alone. [*With a glance at the portrait*] They ain't with her. [*The closing of the outer door is heard.*]

CURTAIN

AMERICA PASSES BY

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

BY

KENNETH ANDREWS

CHARACTERS

A YOUNG MAN

HIS FIANCÉE

A YOUNG HUSBAND

HIS WIFE

Originally produced April 11, 1916 by the Harvard Dramatic Club.

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AMERICA PASSES BY

SCENE: *The living room of a small flat. It is a delightful little room furnished with care and taste; bright, but not flashy. At the rear is a double doorway opening into the "square hall." In the hall are visible a hatstand with its mirror, a bag of golf clubs, etc. In the living room, to the left of the hall doorway, is a tall piano lamp (though there is no piano) with a deep amber shade. At the right of the doorway is a small square black table with visiting cards upon it. In front of the wide low fireplace, which is at the right and quite far front, is a davenport attractive enough of itself and in harmony with the walls and hangings, but too large for the room. Indeed the room has evidently been decorated with this piece of furniture in mind. In the left-hand wall, almost opposite the fireplace, is a window which is also too large for the room: plainly having been constructed with a view to its exterior aspects. In front of the window is a bright brass smoking set. Grouped about are several smart but rather comfortable looking chairs.*

Anne appears in the hall, followed by Kate. Anne has given her coat to Kate, and is removing her hat and veil. Anne is a very pretty girl, but she is dressed very plainly and beside Kate she seems almost dowdy. Kate is like the living room:

AMERICA PASSES BY

bright but not flashy. Her striking "house-gown" is tasteful enough — on her.

KATE [*hanging Anne's coat on the hatstand*] Hurry with the veil. I'm dying to see what you look like.

ANNE [*surrendering her hat and veil*] Ho! You embarrass me!

KATE [*putting her arm about Anne and bringing her into the room*] Did I? Oh, I'm so sorry. But we have n't a single manner. There simply is n't room for them in a honeymoon flat.

ANNE [*as they sit on the davenport*] So this is the flat at last. [*She can't resist a glance around.*]

KATE [*seizing her hands*] And this is Anne! — at last.

ANNE [*smiling*] Do you think I look like a missionary?

KATE. No! [*Springs up.*] Oh, dear me! I forgot. [*She flies to the little black table and takes a bright new Bible from the drawer.*] Bill told us to be sure and have it in a conspicuous place. So we bought one specially — just for fun. [*Gleefully she places it on the mantelpiece.*] There.

ANNE [*a little startled*] Well, I — I am a sort of a missionary: I've always tried to help — you knew that, did n't you?

KATE [*undaunted*] Dear me, yes. I mean, we heard *all* about you from Bill. [*Again on the davenport beside her.*] He does so love to talk about his fiancée.

AMERICA PASSES BY

ANNE [*puzzled*] Bill?

KATE. Yes. Don't you call him Bill?

ANNE. No, I — I call him Benjamin.

KATE. Oh, of course. But we always called him Bill. I don't know why it seemed to fit him.

ANNE. Fit him? Bill? I don't see why it fits him, I'm afraid.

KATE. Well — we grew up together, you know — and when Bill was a little kiddie he used to say [*imitating*], "I wish my name was Bill. It sounds tough." So we — [*She breaks off, laughing.*]

ANNE. Hm.

KATE. He always wrote about you as "the other white person in Japan."

ANNE [*laughing*] That's like him. Oh, it was so wonderful, Mrs. —

KATE. Don't call me Missus. Mercy! Call me Kate!

ANNE. You see, K-Kate, I've always lived in Japan —

KATE. Never been in America before! Think of that!

ANNE. And when Benjamin came — You won't mind if I talk about him? You'll understand because you've just married.

KATE [*dubiously accepting this*] We-ell, two months.

ANNE. I do so want to talk about him. There's been no one but old maids, and missionaries — and that's not the same —

KATE [*throwing her arms about her*] You poor child! Tell me everything! What would be the fun of being in love if you could n't talk about it?

AMERICA PASSES BY

ANNE [*laughing*] It was such a perfect love-story. Most of it happened in a wonderful Japanese garden, full of big shadows and stone lanterns and everything.

KATE. Just what Bill said: a perfect love-story!

ANNE. And Benjamin was such a perfect prince — so just a boy, and —

KATE. Bill certainly is a prince.

ANNE. And we think we'd like to live always near the garden. Perhaps we shall. Benjamin has n't quite decided —

KATE [*aghast*] Bill a missionary!

ANNE. He was fully in the notion in Japan — and in the garden. But — America seems to have changed him.

KATE [*wide-eyed*] You say he was in the notion in Japan?

ANNE [*innocently*] Yes. Why not?

KATE. N-nothing. Only we thought you'd live in Chicago. Pa and I had picked out the flat for you —

ANNE. Pa?

KATE. Yes. Ha, ha! I call him "Pa."

ANNE. You mean your father?

KATE [*stifling a laugh*] No! I mean George!

ANNE. Oh, your husband.

KATE. Yes, I can't seem to get used to calling him "my husband."

ANNE. So you call him "Pa"?

KATE. Yes. It's silly, is n't it?

ANNE [*tapping her foot in thought*] And — he calls you — "Ma"?

AMERICA PASSES BY

KATE [*embarrassed*] Yes.

ANNE. Oh!

KATE. You see, P-P — George and I thought it would be so jolly to have you two across the street — and we wanted you to get married in our flat —

ANNE. It would be jolly, I suppose, if I could ever learn to be an American.

KATE. Better than Japan, don't you think?

ANNE. I — I sometimes wonder. Benjamin has s-seemed different in Chicago. America seems to have changed him. But that's just silly. It's just that I'm so terribly sensitive. If anything should happen!

KATE [*from the heights of her two months' experience*] That's it. I was the same way. Pa tried to get away twice after we were engaged.

ANNE [*shocked and mystified*] To get away?

KATE. Yes, indeed. They will if you don't watch them. [*She goes to the doorway and stands listening.*]

ANNE. Oh, Kate, I — I didn't mean that. But I *know* how good Benjamin is, that he does have such dear ideals, and — of course that sounds like an engaged girl —

KATE [*listening*] There they come at last. I do hope no one sees them.

ANNE. Where is Benjamin? I thought he'd meet me here.

KATE. He and Pa stepped out after a pail of b — [*She catches herself and looks at Anne.*]

ANNE. A what!

KATE [*laughing uncomfortably*] You see, Pa

AMERICA PASSES BY

thought since Bill had been away for so long, they ought to have a kind of a party, as he said. So —

ANNE. What did they go to get? [*As though hurt.*]

KATE. Well, they went to get a pail of beer. Of course that's just what they said.

ANNE [*a little bewildered*] I — suppose I'm silly and narrow, but that does seem a little strange —

KATE. Anne, dear! We never drink — It was just an impulse — Of course just beer. They — sillies — said it would be so “clubby” and plebeian. A pail, you know! [*Her enthusiasm for the “party” is plainly forced, and fails to infect Anne.*]

ANNE. I shan't s-spoil anything. You need n't explain —

KATE. There they are. Just excuse me. [*She goes out with assumed airiness. Her voice, in a clearly audible whisper, outside.*] But, Bill, you old loon, you knew she would n't like it!

BILL [*outside*] Ah, the dickens, we've only —

KATE [*outside*] Not so loud, she'll hear you!

BILL [*outside, a few degrees huskier*] Well, she's got to learn —

KATE [*outside*] Sh-sh-sh! She'll hear you!

BILL [*outside*] Oh, rot! Where is she?

KATE [*outside*] Pa! Give me the beer! [*As Anne listens to this rather undignified colloquy there is a stiffness and primness in her attitude which she would probably deplore if she realized it.*]

AMERICA PASSES BY

Enter Bill. He is a young man of abundant energy and enthusiasm, just now a bit flushed from his argument with Kate, and inclined to bluster to hide his discomfort.

BILL [*seeing Anne*] Well, here we are at last! Is n't this a little nest? [*Goes to her and starts to kiss her.*]

ANNE [*stopping him*] Oh, should you? Well— [*She holds up her lips; he kisses her.*]

BILL [*loudly*] Come in, Pa! [*George enters: very much the young husband, breezy with the first flush of happy married life; young and comfortably prosperous. As George enters.*] Here we are! This is George, Anne. Not very pretty, but sweet and clean.

ANNE [*smiling and shaking hands*] How do you do? So this is George.

GEORGE. "George," that's right. And we call you "Anne," Ma and I, in the bosom of the family, so to speak. Must n't mind if we slip.

KATE [*returning*] Now, Pa, stop trying to be polite. I've told her we have n't any manners.

BILL [*softly to Kate*] What did you do with it?

GEORGE [*to Anne*] I'm glad she warned you —

KATE [*firmly*] I threw it in the sink.

BILL. What?

GEORGE [*wheeling*] Threw it —! [*There is a sudden silence as Bill, George and Kate become conscious of Anne.*]

BILL [*to relieve the impending strain*] Hm, hm. Well, well. Here we are, the four of us. And you two actually married — the world moves!

AMERICA PASSES BY

GEORGE [*his arm about Kate*] Ma, don't you just want to sit and look at him? Home again!

BILL. And that's the greatest feeling in the world.

KATE. And don't you think for a minute you're ever going to run away and be a missionary!

GEORGE [*shouting*] What! Who?

BILL. Good lord, Kate! Can't you take a joke?

GEORGE. Bill a missionary! And he just told a bartender we were n't buying foam, but *beer*!

KATE. George! [*She gives George a terrible look. The three of them look at Anne, realizing that they have been ignoring her completely. Anne sits staring into the fireplace. Kate, going to her, gushingly.*] My dear, won't you come out in the kitchen with me? The dinner's all ready to go on the range. I want you to see what a wonderful housekeeper I am.

ANNE [*rising*] Yes. Let me help. I — I want to learn. [*They go arm in arm: George and Bill stand looking after them.*]

BILL. What d' you think of her, George?

GEORGE. Anne? She's a marvel.

BILL [*enthusiastically*] Is n't she? You — er — you really think so?

GEORGE. She's a wonder. [*Goes to smoking-set.*] Come on. Have a weed.

BILL. I — I sort of cut them out, George.

GEORGE [*in dismay*] No!

BILL [*joining George*] She — rather wanted me to. What are they?

AMERICA PASSES BY

GEORGE. Fatima, of loving memory. [*Puts one in Bill's mouth.*]

BILL. Home again. [*Lights the cigarette, as George holds a match for him.*] I used to crawl around through a temple yard next door over there begging the damn little idols for one. [*He stretches out in a chair.*]

GEORGE. I'll bet. Now what about Kate? Has she grown up into a regular little person?

BILL [*slowly*] "A regular little person." I like that. I suppose that's up-to-now American.

GEORGE. I'm asking you about the Missus.

BILL. She's a regular little person. American, George, all through. Gee! You don't know what that means.

GEORGE. Don't I? I'm the most married man you ever saw. And we've got the flat picked out for you and Anne. Just across the street.

BILL. Look here, you know. I want you to be frank about it. You honestly think Anne is — well, what you expected?

GEORGE. Why, yes, she's a baby, Bill. Of course — [*He stops uncertainly.*]

BILL [*turning to him*] Of course what, George? Don't be afraid.

GEORGE. We-ell — a wee bit religious, I suppose. But we'll make her one of the family if we have to go to church. [*Reassuringly he bangs Bill on the shoulder.*]

BILL. That's fine of you, George. I — I — you know I was simply a fool about her — in Tokyo.

GEORGE [*quickly*] You mean you're not now?

AMERICA PASSES BY

BILL. Well, that 's it. Am I?

GEORGE. Hm. If you were to ask me —

BILL. Shut up, George. I — I suppose it 's the shock of getting back. I feel as though I 'd been away from civilization for centuries.

GEORGE. Do you think she 's changed?

BILL. Not a bit of it. She 's pure gold — but somehow or other the charm of it 's gone.

GEORGE. Well, she 's crazy about you, I can see that.

BILL. Can you? Hm, that makes me happy as the devil. [*He walks restlessly to the window.*]

GEORGE. Of course a man has to be careful. Can't be too careful.

BILL. Did you ever have — doubts?

GEORGE. Ye-es, but I got over them. Don't know just how —

BILL. With Kate it would be different.

GEORGE [*with sudden decision*] I'm going to tell you something, old wagon; I would n't butt in on a bet; and if Anne 's the girl for you, she 's the girl for the four of us —

BILL [*turning back to him*] Go it. Talk straight from the shoulder.

GEORGE. Take it for what it 's worth. The Company marooned me for eight months in a little county seat in Iowa. Two trains passed through the town every day — except Sunday; — that 's all that ever happened there. And lonesome, Lord —

BILL. I know. I went for three weeks once without seeing a white man.

GEORGE. Think of eight months in darkest

AMERICA PASSES BY

Iowa. Then along came Mary. Mary was the general storekeeper's daughter, fair, frank, and freckled. I'd been starving for a little small talk for six months. You know how I took to Mary. She was n't a beauty, of course. But she looked to me like the queen of the movies.

BILL [*with relish*] "The Queen of the Movies!"

GEORGE. Two weeks of Mary, and I wrote up to Kate — we were engaged at the time — and tried to start an argument.

BILL [*in delight, mostly to himself*] "Start an argument!"

GEORGE. But Katie, thank the good Lord, was wise, and too proud to fight. Then I came back to Chicago; and some time later Mary and her dear mother paid a visit to the city. Bill [*shaking his head sadly*], when I saw Mary in the reception room of the club, it knocked me out.

BILL. I know the feeling.

GEORGE. Something about the incongruity of it — She was here three days and I lost five pounds a day. And when she went home I simply ruined a typewriter ribbon trying to tell Kate I wanted to get married.

BILL [*thoughtfully*] I see. I had n't seen a real American girl for three years. Anne came along —

GEORGE. This environment thing is a peculiar machine.

BILL. Our love-story was perfect — simply perfect in Japan. But it does n't seem to go in Chicago — for me.

GEORGE. Watch it, Bill, watch your step.

AMERICA PASSES BY

Just let America pass by. That's what I did with Chicago and Mary. It cured me.

BILL. That's it: let America pass by! For this getting back to civilization has been a tremendous shock. Oh, it's been glorious! America! America! Why, it just rose up and slammed me on the shoulder in San Francisco. And ever since it's been pressing in, pressing in! Life, you know! Real people! Nineteen hundred and now! And somehow — I do hate to say it — Anne is n't a part of America. America is pressing in, and it seems that, in spite of everything, it's pressing her out.

GEORGE. If the little romance does n't bear transplanting, old man, let 'er wither.

BILL. But that month in Tokyo is like a dream. [*Very thoughtfully.*] I shudder to think of spoiling that for her — or for myself.

KATE [*appearing in the doorway and staring at Bill*] What on earth's he doing, Pa? Praying?

BILL [*turning guiltily*] Where's Anne?

KATE. In the kitchen. She makes me ashamed of myself. She knows twice as much as I do.

BILL. About — cooking?

GEORGE [*removing the fluffy white apron which Kate has over her gown*] Wait till you're married, Bill, you'll realize how important that is —

KATE [*taking the apron from him, wheeling him about and fastening it around his waist*] I think she's lovely, Bill.

GEORGE [*as he submits to having the apron fastened on him*] You see, Bill, what it brings us to: hookworms and kitchen mechanics.

AMERICA PASSES BY

KATE [*as she finishes tying the apron on him*] Poor old Pa, poor old Pa! [*Rises to her tiptoes and kisses him on the back of the head.*] There. Go out and show Anne how well I've trained you. [*George goes out.*]

BILL [*when George is gone*] So you like Anne?

KATE. Oh, she's a dear.

BILL. Honest?

KATE [*surprised*] Why, yes. I love her, or shall.

BILL [*suddenly pointing*] Are those shoes the latest?

KATE [*pressing back her skirts and putting her feet together*] Yes, sir. Do you like them?

BILL. I love them!

KATE [*still stooping, looking up at him*] Love them?

BILL. Love 'em! You don't know what those shoes are to me. Something I've been hungering for for three years.

KATE [*laughing*] And they only cost four-thirty-six. I got them at a sale. Now tell me about yourself.

BILL. And I'm crazy about that dress. There's something ultra-American about it.

KATE. This? Bill! It's a year old!

BILL. Never. It's the newest thing in the world.

KATE. Dear me! Go on. What do you think of my hair? [*She looks at him brightly, and gives her head a little flirt.*]

BILL [*rising in his enthusiasm*] Splendid!

AMERICA PASSES BY

Kate, some time I want you to do that again for me — some time when I 'm not expecting it.

KATE [*at a loss*] What?

BILL. Turn your head, just that way! I'd forgotten, plumb forgotten that women did it!

KATE [*laughing uncertainly*] Silly. Tell me about Japan. [*Kate arranges herself on the davenport prepared to believe anything.*]

BILL [*all life gone out of his manner*] It's a beautiful country.

KATE. How specific! Do they dance there?

BILL. No — not as we do. [*Warms up again.*] The men and women don't dance together. They don't twist themselves into outlandish postures, and make glorious fools of themselves, and get their heads ringing with the jolliest, craziest, liveliest tunes in the world — and — [*stopping out of breath*] as we do. God bless us!

KATE. My! Then you haven't been to a dance for three years!

BILL. It seems about three hundred.

KATE [*clasping her hands*] Then, Bill! You don't know a single one of the new dances!

BILL. No. Are there some?

KATE [*shrieking*] You poor old foreigner! Here — [*seizing him*] do let me show you! [*She starts a "syncopated walk."*]

BILL. W-wait! What's the general idea? I can two-step!

KATE. Sh-sh! The flat's small. Some one might hear you. Now watch 'er step. [*She leaves him and executes a graceful little fox-trot, sway-*

AMERICA PASSES BY

ing, and "hesitating," and gliding; whirls around lightly, smiling at him.]

BILL [*with a sigh, as he watches*] America passes by!

KATE [*bowing*] There you are. Mrs. Castle, n'est-ce pas?

BILL. Mrs. Who?

KATE. Castle, Bill! You don't know about Mr. and Mrs. Vernon?

BILL. I admit it. Should I know them?

KATE. No hope. And you don't know a single Ford story?

BILL. Sewell Ford? Wrote about Shorty McCabe?

KATE. Lovely, Bill, how lovely! A Ford is what you get when you can't afford an automobile. There are people who can't even get a Ford. Pa and I are some.

BILL. Oh — the name of a car.

KATE. And every one should have a Ford story. But they're all old now. Mine was the one about the man who drove his Ford up a hill, and let one of his feet hang outside.

BILL. Go on. It's new to me.

KATE. Fancy that! Well, everybody thought it was a roller skate.

BILL. What?

KATE. The *Ford*!

BILL. Oh, I see! Ha, ha! Because it was so small, eh?

KATE. Yes, Bill, because it was so small. That's right — [*Above, the sound of a ragtime piano is heard.*]

AMERICA PASSES BY

BILL [*raising his eyes to the ceiling*] Just a minute! Is — That's ragtime!

KATE. The joys of living in a flat.

BILL [*dropping on the arm of the davenport, and gazing raptly at the ceiling*] Ragtime!

KATE [*whispering very confidentially*] It's the little girl upstairs; she can do it for hours!

BILL [*raising his hands in ecstasy*] Kate, it's more American than a bright new copper penny!

KATE [*seeing that he likes it she proceeds to interpret American ragtime for him; watching him, and moving her hands, shoulders and head with the melody*] "Come along with me — we'll have a jubilee — in my old Kentucky ho-ome!" [*The tune upstairs changes.*] R-r-run me up — and down the keees — ta-ta-tumtum — my harmoncees — ta-ta-tumtumtum — are sure to pleeeees —

BILL. Sounds like "Silver Threads."

KATE [*chanting the words into the tune*] Yes — it — is syncopated Silver Threads — [*Breathlessly she drops into a chair.*] Everything is syncopated now! Hum. [*Again the tune changes.*]

BILL. What's that one?

KATE. "Aw-merica — I lo-ove you — and there's a hun-dred milyun oth-ers like me!" Bang! What do you think of that?

BILL. It's awful, perfectly awful. But I love it! "A hundred million others like me" — that's the way I feel about getting back. Just like that.

AMERICA PASSES BY

Back among my own people — where there's a hundred million others like me. That's a great feeling after three years in the wilderness!

KATE [*bromidically*] Still, I'd like to travel. I think it's so broadening.

BILL [*brought to earth with a thud*] The deuce you would!

KATE. I think one learns more from a year's travel than from a college education.

BILL [*in joy*] Old bromides! Old bromides, new slang — I don't know which I like the best!

KATE [*suddenly sniffing*] Georgie!

GEORGE [*from the kitchen*] Yes, m' dear?

KATE. Turn the meat.

GEORGE [*from the kitchen*] Yes, m' dear. Which way shall I turn it?

KATE [*springing up and dashing out*] Oh! Can't you smell it?

GEORGE [*from the kitchen*] Ye-as, m' dear. [*When she is gone Bill rises and heaves a sigh of happiness. The music has begun again upstairs. Bill hums, "Where there's a hundred million others like me." He moves to the window, holds aside the curtain, and looking out with a whimsical smile, hums "America I love you . . . a hundred million others like me!" Anne has entered. Silently she watches his devotions, as she removes her apron and wipes her hands on it. She sits on the davenport, and waits for him to finish.*]

ANNE [*over her shoulder*] They told me to come in, Benjamin; they said it would be our last chance to be alone.

AMERICA PASSES BY

BILL [*starting and turning*] Oh, Anne! I did n't hear you come in. [*He looks at her as though he had forgotten her existence.*]

ANNE. They assumed that we would want to be together.

BILL [*taking a step toward her*] Well — don't we?

ANNE [*smiling and holding out her hands to him*] Why, of course. [*Bill sits beside her on the davenport holding her hands.*] So this is George and Kate.

BILL. Are n't they the best fellows in the world! Properly, I suppose I should call them "real and regular." Don't you like that?

ANNE. Like what, Benjamin?

BILL. "Real and regular": just the phrase. It's American, fresh from the mint.

ANNE. Hm. I'm afraid I don't see quite what it means.

BILL. Well, don't you think Pa and Ma are great?

ANNE. Yes, they're jolly — and your friends.

BILL [*cooled somewhat*] You know — they mean a lot to me.

ANNE. Yes. I can see they do.

BILL [*rising uncomfortably*] I don't know quite what you mean. I — I'm afraid you don't understand how well I like them.

ANNE. It all seems so very different.

BILL. What's different?

ANNE. Everything. I did n't think their flat would be like this in Tokyo.

BILL. To me their flat's a bit of Heaven.

AMERICA PASSES BY

ANNE [*looking up at him*] Is this what we want to do with our lives?

BILL [*studying her curiously*] You mean — it is n't?

ANNE. When we spend evenings like this, are we making any one happier? Is this the life of service we planned in Tokyo?

BILL. Oh! Anne, that's ridiculous.

ANNE. You did n't think it was ridiculous in Tokyo.

BILL. Did n't I? Well — is n't that peculiar? It's true, I did n't.

ANNE. Oh! What has made such a change in you? You're not as you were in Tokyo. I can't believe you're the same person at all!

BILL [*unhappily*] I know, Anne. You have felt it then.

ANNE. Felt it! No, I have n't! I've fought it away.

BILL. But I know what you mean. You seem like a stranger to me.

ANNE [*very bitterly and helplessly*] What has made the difference? You are you, and I am I! What has happened to us?

BILL. I think perhaps it's — America.

ANNE. America! Where we thought we'd be so happy. Oh, it's all so boisterous and harsh. It's hateful. Chicago is hideous!

BILL. I'm afraid there's just the trouble, Anne. To me Chicago is glorious.

ANNE. How can you say that? It's selfish, brutal —

BILL [*insisting quietly*] No, I love Chicago.

AMERICA PASSES BY

ANNE. After the simplicity and beauty of Japan. We were so close to life there!

BILL. Close to life. It was n't life at all. It's here we're in life. I love the smell of the asphalt. I love the gloom and dusk that lurk under the trestles of the Elevated. A traffic cop is a masterpiece!

ANNE. Don't talk so!

BILL. I even like the posters on the streets, with their stiff green lines and horribly skinny men. It's a profound experience for me to walk down Michigan Avenue: pearl gray shoes, blue silk, white fur, derby hats, the English language, horn spectacles, cigars, mustaches, shop-windows, sky-signs — oh! America!

ANNE [*laughing a little*] Of — of course you're glad to be home again —

BILL. Home again! *Alive* again!

ANNE. But those things are all foreign to me, Benjamin; foreign, foreign.

BILL [*touched and going to her*] Anne — don't mind me. I can't help it. I love them all!

ANNE [*miserably*] Those trivial, silly things —

BILL. Those are just the sparkles on the surface. These stunning, ultra, elaborately simple creations are just part of our blessed struggle for the next thing, new discoveries, new effects, new beauties from life. That striving, that joyous, mad scramble for new things, bright new things, somehow is America. It all stirs something in me to the sizzling point!

ANNE. And it all distresses me, and hurts me and confuses me!

AMERICA PASSES BY

BILL. Anne, I'm mad to get into the big procession, just a tiny niche in one of those skyscrapers — with typewriters clicking all about me — that's all I want if I can feel I'm a part of it all.

ANNE [*desperately*] And don't you know I can never be a part of it? It is stylish and modern, and I am not —

BILL. Stylish and modern — and young. The Youth of All the World! That's why I love it!

ANNE. And in Japan we said we wanted things that are simple and clean.

BILL. I'd forgotten what a great old century we're living in. The music of passing motor cars! Why, when I got into that Northwestern Station and looked up at those stretches of marble, and heard a roar about "The next train — for Evanston!" and saw a news-stand glittering with the colors of new magazines, and heard the newsboys croaking, "Wuxtree, Tenth Edition!" I wanted to throw my hat on the floor and jump on it.

ANNE. Yes. I've felt it coming. It's all worse than the heathen things the Japanese do. At least they have a God!

BILL. Yes, it's true. This plunge into the living has done something to us. Mrs. Vernon Castle! Fifty thousand people at a football game. It's all America!

ANNE [*sitting on the davenport, looking away from him, with a change of voice*] Benjamin, do you think you love me — still?

AMERICA PASSES BY

BILL [*his jaw dropping*] Why — of course I do. Anne, how could you ask such a question!

ANNE. It was n't easy — or politic, I suppose.

BILL. But don't — I mean let's not — this has nothing to do with our — our love [*with an effort*] — dear.

ANNE. Oh! If I could think so! But for instance, Benjamin —

BILL [*as though he had endured it too long*]. I wish you would n't call me that.

ANNE. What?

BILL. What you just called me: Benjamin. Nobody ever does except to jolly me. I wish you'd call me Bill.

ANNE. Well — Bill — do you think I could ever wear my hair as Kate does? Or wear shoes like hers? And stockings that really seem vulgar to me?

BILL. Good Lord! Why not?

ANNE. Some girls can dress — well, stylishly — others can't. It's not a mere matter of putting on the clothes. I could n't do it, ever. Even if — I loved you. I could n't.

BILL [*after a slight pause*] Of course, that's a little thing.

ANNE [*on the point of giving way to her emotion at last*] No! I think it's a big thing — enormous, and strange — and pitiless! [*Her voice breaks; she buries her face in her arms.*]

BILL [*surprised; coming to her kindly*] Why, Anne!

ANNE [*bitterly*] Don't feel sorry for me! I really could n't stand that!

AMERICA PASSES BY

BILL [*standing awkwardly behind her*] We — we can't quite understand it. I — I know you're right, Anne. I think perhaps —

ANNE. It would be better if I said it, don't you think? You're trying to be a gentleman — and that's good of you.

BILL [*helplessly*] Let's be careful. Why, here we are in George's flat. We mustn't spoil it. We've dreamed of it so often — and here's our dream come true!

ANNE. I was going to say that in Japan you thought I was — well — beautiful.

BILL [*dutifully, but without conviction*] I — I think so — still.

ANNE [*with a little laugh*] I think that ends our engagement! [*With a start she faces him, and for a moment they stand looking rather stupidly at each other. She turns away from him.*] And in Japan I was Youth and America — all your life lacked there. And you were that to me: Youth and what I thought America was. You see now that I am not American at all, and not young in your way. And your youth that I loved there is different in its own environment. It is something I cannot understand — or love, Benjamin — Bill.

BILL. You're brave about it. Anne, that's like you.

ANNE. I — I have wondered if the boy and girl we were in Japan — for we were so young there — are n't over in Tokyo — still.

BILL. It's all very strange, Anne. I'm afraid those two — that is, what they were to each other

AMERICA PASSES BY

— were part of the pine trees, and tea-houses, and bamboo lattices —

ANNE [*breathlessly*] And stone lanes, and old temples, and paper lanterns, and oh —! Yes! I suppose our — our love is still over there. I should n't care to bring it to Chicago!

BILL [*earnestly*] Anne! We must try —

ANNE. We have tried. When a dream fades, you can't bring it back.

BILL. Dear, you don't mean we —

ANNE [*looking at him, fully realizing the irony of her words*] Bill — I shan't let you marry me.

BILL. Strange. If you'd said that two months ago, I'd have committed hara-kiri.

ANNE. Yes. But that was in Japan.

KATE [*from the kitchen*] Honk! Honk! We're coming. Take separate chairs.

ANNE. Benjamin, I can't stand it. Won't you put your arms around me — as if you loved me —

BILL [*hastily sitting beside her and taking her in his arms*] It's a beastly shame, Anne.

ANNE. It's just my little pride. All the things I told Kate about you, and our love. Try to make them think we love each other, just during dinner and this evening. Please! [*Kate and George appear in the door.*]

KATE. Oh, oh, oh! Look at these very young people, Pa! Are n't they silly?

BILL. Dinner ready, Pa? [*Anne and Bill rise; Bill keeps his arm about Anne.*]

GEORGE. All ready.

KATE [*going to Anne and Bill, putting her*

AMERICA PASSES BY

arms around them both, squeezing them together and drawing them toward the door] Oh! You two old spooners! We've been dreaming of this little dinner for ages and ages — with just us four! [*Over her shoulder to George.*] Oh, Pa! Is n't it jolly? They're going to sit in their own places at our table. Anne and Bill at last!

GEORGE. It's bully, old lady.

CURTAIN

